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July 2020

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Natalia Wright

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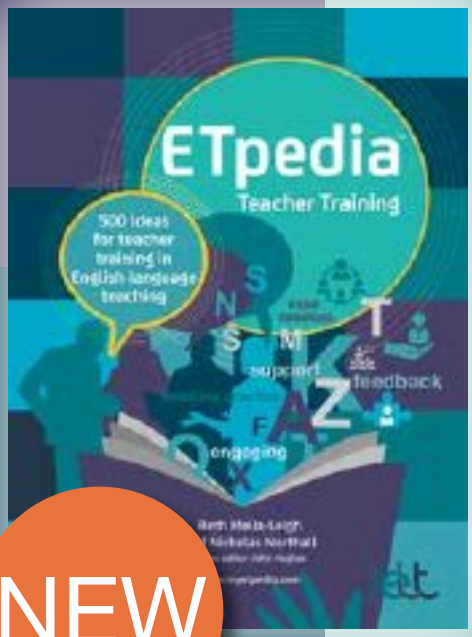

NEW

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Authors: Beth Melia-Leigh and Nicholas Northall

Series Editor: John Hughes

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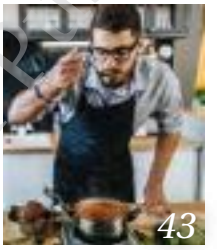

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Editorial

The last issue of *ETp* included several articles giving advice on the technical side of the sudden switch from face-to-face to online teaching occasioned by the Covid-19 lockdown. By the time you receive this issue, teachers in some countries may be starting to return to the classroom, but many others will still be required to teach online. The articles chosen for this issue reflect this duality and concentrate less on how to set up your online classes, and more on what to do with the students once you are firmly established in your virtual classroom. I notice a recurrent theme in many of the articles, suggesting that online teaching may be seen to have actual advantages, rather than merely being a poor substitute for 'the real thing'. I wonder how many teachers will continue to incorporate an online element in their teaching once the virus crisis is over.

One of the most inventive ideas comes from Michelle Ocriciano, who takes the opportunity of having access to her own kitchen (and possibly also the virtual kitchens of her students) during her English classes to base her lessons on food – always a popular topic – and actually demonstrate her favourite recipe for pizza.

Both Riccardo Chiappini and Nicky Hockly tackle the question of how to engage the very young (and their parents) in online English lessons, whilst Chris Roland maintains that structure and support are crucial to managing the fun that can be had with his online activities for children.

Sandi Ferdiansyah and Kenia Ninoska Obando have found the Covid-19 lockdown a perfect time to run their intercultural collaboration project, with students from Indonesia and Nicaragua working together on personal digital videos.

Our main feature, by Natalia Wright, makes an important point about teaching, whether this is done face to face or online: the teacher remains fundamental. She is concerned that a complete switch to online teaching runs the risk of fulfilling science fiction writer Isaac Asimov's vision of a future in which students no longer attend school or interact with each other, and where the teacher is a robot rather than a human.

Whether you are revelling in the possibilities of online teaching, lamenting its restrictions or perhaps even celebrating your return to the classroom, albeit with social distancing precautions, I wish you all the best for the next few months, and hope that you, your families and your students remain happy and healthy.

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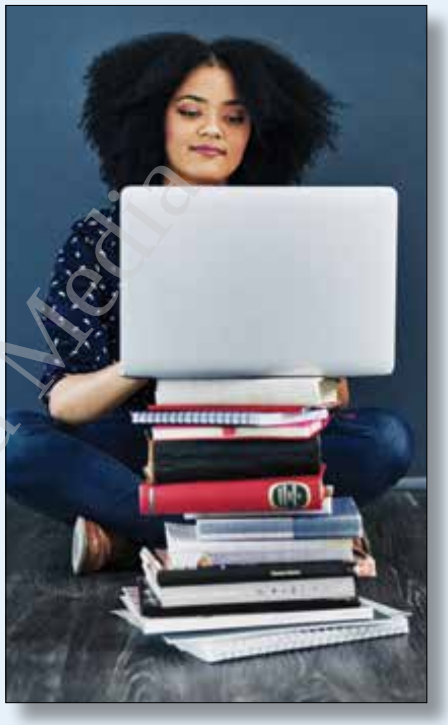


ONLINE RESOURCES

Wise Ma Sabe

There was once a wise girl whose name was Ma Sabe. She lived with her mother in a simple home by a river with a little land which they farmed. They had to pay a high rent to the king, who was a powerful, cruel and selfish man and owned all the land. All the farmers owed him a lot of money. The king had 300 wives and was always looking for a new one. Ma Sabe loved a blacksmith and wished to marry no one but him.

One day, the king was riding out on his white elephant when he saw Ma Sabe near the river. 'She will be my new wife.'

The king rode on to the small house by the river and found Ma Sabe's mother.

'I will marry your daughter.'

'No, that cannot be,' said Ma Sabe's mother. She knew about the king's cruelty and greed.

'You are saying no to me? I am the king and you owe me rent. You cannot refuse.'

The king was furious as he rode away.

The next day, the king returned on his white elephant, which was now decorated with bright colours. The king was wearing a crown set with rubies and was followed by a band of soldiers in shining armour. There, outside the house beside the river, Ma Sabe stood with her mother and her beloved blacksmith.

'Ma Sabe,' said the king, 'I wish you to be my new wife, but your mother has other ideas, so I am giving you a chance. Here, I have a game for you to play. In this beautiful embroidered bag there are two small stones, one white and one black. Put your hand in the bag and take a stone. If you choose the white stone, your mother's debt is cancelled and you will not have to marry me. However, if the stone you pick is black, then the debt is still cancelled, but you will be my wife. What do you say?'

'No!' cried Ma Sabe's mother.

Ma Sabe paused to think. She guessed that the cruel king had put two black stones in the bag. If she refused to play, she knew the king would be angry, and would cause her mother problems. But if she took out a black stone, she would have to marry the unkind and selfish king. She looked at the blacksmith, the man she loved, and thought about what to do. Then she looked the king in the eye.

What do you think Ma Sabe did? What would you do?

'I will do it. I will play the game.'

She walked towards the king and reached into the bag. She took out one stone, gripped tightly in her hand. She held her hand close to her face and opened her fingers just enough so that only she could see. She shouted out with joy and then she laughed.

'I am safe, I do not have to marry the king. My mother has no more debts. I am free to marry the man I want!'

She ran and jumped and span around and threw the stone into the river.

The king shouted in confusion.

'What have you done?'

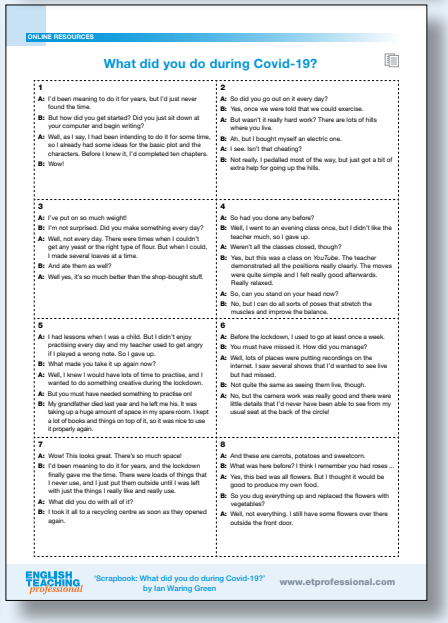
'Oh, dear king. I was so pleased at not having to marry you that I accidentally dropped the stone into the river.'

'But you took the black stone!'

'My dear king, if you look in the bag you will see that the stone that is still in there is black. So you know the colour of the stone I dropped in the river was white.'

The king was confused and angry but could say nothing in front of his soldiers. He climbed back onto his elephant and rode away.

With her mother's blessing, wise Ma Sabe was soon married to the blacksmith, and they lived a long and happy life.



ONLINE RESOURCES

What did you do during Covid-19?

1
A: I'd been meaning to do it for years, but I'd just never found the time.
B: But how did you get started? Did you just sit down at your computer and begin writing?
A: Well, as I say, I had been intending to do it for some time, so I already had some ideas for the basic plot and the characters. Before I knew it, I'd completed ten chapters.
B: Wow!

2
A: So did you go out on it every day?
B: Yes, once we were told that we could exercise.
A: But wasn't it really hard work? There are lots of hills where you live.
B: Ah, but I bought myself an electric one.
A: I see. Isn't that cheating?
B: Not really. I pedalled most of the way, but just got a bit of extra help for going up the hills.

3
A: I've put on so much weight!
B: I'm not surprised. Did you make something every day?
A: Well, not every day. There were times when I couldn't get any yeast or the right type of flour. But when I could, I made several loaves at a time.
B: And ate them as well?
A: Well yes, it's so much better than the shop-bought stuff.

4
A: So had you done any before?
B: Well, I went to an evening class once, but I didn't like the teacher much, so I gave up.
A: Weren't all the classes closed, though?
B: Yes, but this was a class on YouTube. The teacher demonstrated all the positions really clearly. The moves were quite simple and I felt really good afterwards. Really relaxed.
A: So, can you stand on your head now?
B: No, but I can do all sorts of poses that stretch the muscles and improve the balance.

5
A: I had lessons when I was a child. But I didn't enjoy practising every day and my teacher used to get angry if I played a wrong note. So I gave up.
B: What made you take it up again now?
A: Well, I knew I would have lots of time to practise, and I wanted to do something creative during the lockdown.
A: But you must have needed something to practise on!
B: My grandfather died last year and he left me his. It was taking up a huge amount of space in my spare room. I kept a lot of books and things on top of it, so it was nice to use it properly again.

6
A: Before the lockdown, I used to go at least once a week.
B: You must have missed it. How did you manage?
A: Well, lots of places were putting recordings on the internet. I saw several shows that I'd wanted to see live but had missed.
B: Not quite the same as seeing them live, though.
A: No, but the camera work was really good and there were little details that I'd never have been able to see from my usual seat at the back of the circle!

7
A: Wow! This looks great. There's so much space!
B: I'd been meaning to do it for years, and the lockdown finally gave me the time. There were loads of things that I never use, and I just put them outside until I was left with just the things I really like and really use.
A: What did you do with all of it?
B: I took it all to a recycling centre as soon as they opened again.

8
A: And these are carrots, potatoes and sweetcorn.
B: What was here before? I think I remember you had roses ...
A: Yes, this bed was all flowers. But I thought it would be good to produce my own food.
B: So you dug everything up and replaced the flowers with vegetables?
A: Well, not everything. I still have some flowers over there outside the front door.

Wise Ma Sabe

Accompanies 'Students' stories 19' by David Heathfield, page 30

What did you do during Covid-19?

Accompanies 'Scrapbook: hobbies' by Ian Waring Green, page 36

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Digital issue

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Recognising the importance of teachers

Natalia Wright voices her vision of the future.

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This article has been inspired by the many voices in Issue 128 of *ETp* who responded to the sudden need to switch to online teaching during the Covid-19 crisis.

There is a mushrooming body of literature which places the *students* at the forefront of everything teachers do. However, accounts of teachers as the driving force of education and their centrality in the educational landscape seem to be anecdotal rather than formally acknowledged. Therefore, in this article, I would like to re-focus public attention away from the students and onto the *teachers*, who are the *sine qua nons* of successful learning.

Asimov's vision came true

In Isaac Asimov's short story 'The fun they had', Tommy and Margie are two children of the future, both of whom are having unsatisfactory experiences with their education, which is conducted entirely online by robot teachers, in solitude and with no human interaction whatsoever. One day in 2157, Tommy finds a book (an ancient artefact, almost unheard of in their time) in his attic. It describes the schools of the past – in other words, those of our own time:

'All the kids from the whole neighbourhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom, going home together at the end of the day. And the teachers were people …'

To me, this portrayal of our present-day schools (seen from the viewpoint of 2157) seems far from the reality that Asimov intended. Indeed, the world of today bears very little similarity to the world of just a few years ago, when such a picture of school life would have been more accurate (Asimov's short story was written in 1951). The learning process these days reminds me more of the distant future scenario so realistically painted by the author, where the concept of school means regular hours spent in a 'schoolroom next to the bedroom', in front of a flashing screen with a mechanical teacher. Such a dystopian image of a school can hardly leave anybody untouched. Even the word 'school' itself does not sound appropriate in the context of the global pandemic that the world is facing at the moment. With the closure of schools during the Covid-19 crisis, millions of Margies and Tommys around the world unwillingly sit themselves in front of their flashing screens every day and, with a considerable nudge from their parents, try to learn. One important detail, though, is different from the 2157 school

described by Asimov: the teachers are still human beings who are still (and I hope will always be) central to the whole teaching–learning process. It is for their energy and passion for teaching no matter what, their commitment to their chosen path, and their unquestionable eagerness to respond in an adequate and timely way to the ever-changing realities of our life, that I call teachers the 'hearts and souls' of learning.

A changing landscape

The Covid-19 situation has redefined the notion of teaching, and assigned teachers a completely new role: that of 'online tutors' or 'virtual assistants'. It seems to me that society has placed too much pressure on teachers to bridge the gaps and ensure that the established learning outcomes are met, without providing them with what they need to achieve this. Thus, the global situation has revealed the unpreparedness of educators to respond efficiently to the sudden crisis. Lack of appropriate guidance, training and resources has put a lot of stress on teachers across the globe, who already feel that the ground is shifting under their feet. Online teaching is not something that is generally covered on teacher training courses. Teachers, in their turn, also place high expectations on their students, requiring them to become autonomous, technologically-literate learners overnight.

To make matters worse, the pressure to teach online for six to seven hours daily is amplified by an emerging appeal in recent articles that we should 'make ourselves available' to our students and 'be sensitive' to their needs. I have come across numerous websites which offer support to teachers, in the form of guides to online teaching and strategies for online learning. In my opinion, the support that teachers *really* need involves help with how to stay mentally healthy and motivated to teach, and this kind of information is sadly lacking.

Suddenly, parents – whose role has also undergone considerable transformation – have got a taste of what it is like to school their children, and they have quickly realised that teaching is an extremely challenging and laborious undertaking.

My students nostalgically reminisce about 'the fun they had' in the real classroom, when they could interact with each other and enjoy the other benefits that face-to-face learning inherently possesses. The experience of being separated from my students by a screen and being unable to see their faces has made me painfully aware that this new method of lesson delivery has dehumanised the entire notion of teaching and learning.

Technology: blessing or curse?

The process of globalisation and advances in digital technology have contributed significantly to increasing demands to reassess the kind of knowledge that a teaching professional needs to have. It seems that there has never been a more urgent time than now, in these unprecedented circumstances, for teachers to be technologically literate; and technology is generally perceived as something *good* that is here to ease our existence.

In light of recent circumstances, however, how many of us can honestly say that this is true? In our CVs, we are proudly claiming the ability to use technology as a marker of our professionalism, but how many of us were actually ready and technically (and technologically) equipped to teach online when we were suddenly called upon to do so?

Rapidly changing technological tools have made it virtually impossible for teachers to keep up with all the latest developments, and many of us have found that our inability to do so has eroded our enthusiasm for technology.

Taking advantage of the perceived need for more and more technology, major tech giants like Google or Microsoft have continued to increase their power and hold over the market by generating more and more pricey digital products. This is not to say that we are not enjoying the benefits that technological advances bring. However, the relentlessness of their promotion is alarming. Having fallen in love with technology in the late 1990s, many of us have ended up resenting it. We feel that it is driving us away from the face-to-face model of teaching preferred by many teaching professionals into the fashion of digitalised education delivery.

A possible future?

One scenario of the post-pandemic future of teaching and learning, which is enthusiastically shared at many levels of society, involves online education becoming a strategic priority at every institution, gradually replacing classroom learning. If such a situation becomes a reality, then soon a 'school' as we once perceived it – as a building where all students gathered to interact with each other and their teachers – will become a memory of the old days. From this dystopian stance, the future of education somewhat resembles that described in Asimov's story. What about human teachers? Will mechanical teachers replace them? I really hope not. Online learning undoubtedly provides opportunities, but can never replicate or replace face-to-face classroom interaction.

♦ ♦ ♦

The lessons learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic should prompt us to engage in a period of reflection and to open up a dialogue about how we want to educate future generations. I sincerely hope that teachers will be included in these debates, as they are the ones who are, and who will be, dealing with the complexities of teaching and making learning happen. They are the people who should have the greatest say in the development of future education policies, as they might be able to guide the world to a mutually favourable scenario where their role as the 'hearts and souls' of learning will become more recognised and supported. ■

Asimov, I 'The fun they had' *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 1954

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Success with online activities

David Byrne and **Mark Heffernan** establish criteria for successful peer–peer monitoring.

In a physical classroom there's a lot we teachers can get away with, but moving online (thank you, Covid-19) has shone the harsh glow of the computer screen on some of our common practices and bad habits. One question in particular that keeps coming up amongst the teachers we've been speaking with is: *How do we monitor pair- and groupwork if our students are all in separate breakout rooms? We can't be everywhere at once!*

No, we can't. But let's consider the physical classroom for a moment. Of course, it's easier to set up pairwork quickly and move around the class monitoring when you're in the same room as your students, but perhaps this ease has made us a little complacent.

Here are some questions we'd like you to mull over while you read:

1. Can you monitor everyone in a physical classroom at the same time?
2. How much student output are you realistically monitoring at any one time?
3. How clear are your instructions before the task?

David is going to give you the answers for himself on an average teaching day:

1. *No. On a good day, I can probably listen to one group at a time, and I like to think that my magical teaching ears are tuned to hear glaring errors across the room.*
2. *If I'm honest, I'm probably only hearing up to 25 percent of the student output at any one time.*
3. *I like to think they're reasonably clear, but that I can always fall back on reissuing instructions to any group that is off-task as I monitor.*

Steps to success

For the purposes of this article, if we accept the above as more or less average for the majority of teachers, then we can say that at any one time, even in a physical classroom, we are missing up to 75 percent of student output in a speaking activity.

If we consider the online classroom, the situation worsens. At any one time, we can only monitor the people in the breakout room we are currently in. Glaring errors in other groups will go completely unnoticed. Wayward groups who are completely off-task will be left to be so for even longer than normal. Unclear instructions could lead to the students being off-task, or even worse, in groups who have no idea what to do and who sit in silence awaiting your arrival in their breakout room.

So, what's the answer?

- **Accept the situation:** You cannot be everywhere.
- **Adapt to the situation:** Give more time to setting up the task and create mini-monitors.

Let's divide the latter into steps:

Step 1: Give more time

Don't rush the setting up. With online teaching, you can't get away with quick instructions. You need to ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them and what to do if the task goes wrong. Consider giving someone in the group the role of contacting you if they need help or are unsure of what to do. Ensure that all the students know what you will be doing while they are working:

- Will you be taking a couple of minutes to set up the next activity?
- Will you be silently moving around each breakout room and monitoring for good examples?
- Will you come into each group and get involved in their discussion?

Step 2: Tripods

Instead of pairs, set up groups of three, so that two students are carrying out the speaking task and one student is monitoring. Then they can swap.

Step 3: Give clear success criteria

By this stage, your students know what to do if something goes wrong in their groups, they are in tripods and one student is ready to monitor. But what are they monitoring for? How do they know what to listen for? One of the issues we've encountered in the past with peer-to-peer feedback is that it's either vague or quite subjective. Very often, it will focus on content as opposed to language or skills feedback. What we have learnt over the years is that we have been asking too much of our students. We have been asking them to do something without giving them the tools to do so. We have been asking them to hang a painting without a hammer or a nail.

They need more guidance. Let's take exam classes as an example. Over the years, I have often seen exam teachers encouraging their students to self-monitor or peer-monitor, and I have seen their students do so effectively. What's the difference? Well, in exam classes, thanks to exam handbooks, we have clear criteria for each exam task, so the students know what is expected of them. They know how long they have to speak for, they know what language points they need to try to include: in short, they know what success looks like. This enables them to give each other

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feedback. For example: *You only spoke for 40 seconds, You had 20 more seconds to use* or *You described the pictures, but you didn't use comparatives, so you're not comparing them.*

To enable our general English students to do the same, we need to give them success criteria for each speaking activity. But where can we find these? Your success criteria for a speaking activity should be based on what you've taught. Consider:

- *The language you want the students to use:*
  This could be the vocabulary you've taught in the lesson. It could be the grammar point you've examined.
- *The skills you want them to use:*
  It could be that you have taught them about showing interest or keeping a conversation going.
- *The pronunciation you want them to focus on:*
  This could be some aspect of connected speech you've taught them, related to the grammar point from the lesson.
- *The successful outcome of the speaking task:*
  This could be to decide who had the best weekend or whose national dish sounds most delicious.

For example, if the topic of your lesson is national dishes and you've taught your students adjectives for describing food, the skill of showing interest and the skill of describing dishes to someone from another country, then the success criteria for the activity might be as follows:

What does successfully describing national dishes include?

- ☐ Using the adjectives from today's lesson (eg *moreish, savoury, salty, sweet, delicious, warming*).
- ☐ Using *sort of like, kind of like* and *similar to* to compare dishes.
- ☐ Using the weak form of *of*.
- ☐ Using *that sounds amazing/delicious* to show interest.
- ☐ Describing one dish each and deciding which one is the most delicious.

These criteria need to be communicated to the students prior to the activity. By wording them in check-box form (as above), it's easier for the students to see them as steps to success. Breaking the lesson and the production stage down into these criteria can help our learners to see that everything they have learnt today was not just random, but was building towards a communicative goal.

There are many ways to begin a discussion about your success criteria, but here are a few ideas:

- Model a successful example and elicit what made it successful. This could be a dialogue from earlier in the unit.
- Model an unsuccessful example and elicit what made it unsuccessful. Turn these points around to create success criteria.
- Use the criteria as a way of checking learning from the lesson. Ask your students what they have learnt today that could help them with the final production task.

Feedback as a dialogue

This article merely scratches the surface of success criteria and their use, but here are just a few of what we see as the key advantages to including them in your lessons:

- The students are more aware of what is expected of them in the task.
- The students can choose to focus on all of them or just a few of them, depending on their weaknesses.
- Monitors can give more focused feedback, because they know what they're looking out for.
- The students can use them to reflect on their own production.
- The criteria can be negotiated with the students before the task, so they feel more invested in the activity.

Now, you're probably all thinking the same thing: *Can we trust the students to give feedback? They'll inevitably give incorrect feedback at some point and we'll miss it.*

Yes, this may be the case, which is why it is crucial to ensure that the criteria are clear and that your students are aware of what will happen after the task. If questions arise and they are unsure of the answer, should they bring *you* into the discussion *immediately* or will these questions be dealt with *after* the speaking task when you all come back together? It's important that this is established *before* the task, so that you can cut down on the issue above. The key here is ensuring that feedback is a dialogue and that the students are involved in this discussion.

And remember, the alternative is that the majority of their production is missed entirely and the students leave the speaking activity and the lesson with little to no feedback … and that just isn't acceptable.

♦ ♦ ♦

Teaching online has been something of a learning curve for many of us. The real question is if we will take the lessons we've learnt back with us to our physical classrooms when this is all over. Ensuring that our students have clear guidance and the ability to give meaningful, objective feedback to their peers is one lesson we hope will stay with us long after Covid-19 has gone. ■

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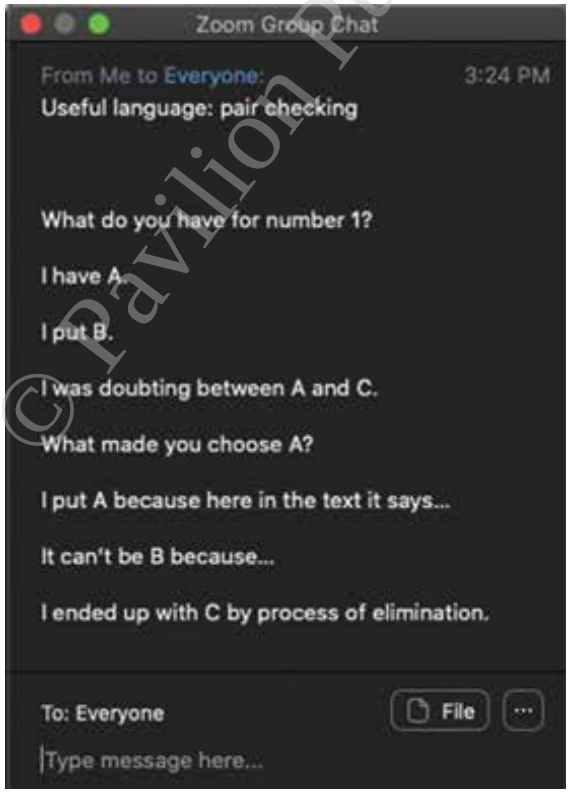
The chat box

Ethan Mansur zooms in on tips and tasks.



A *Zoom* chat box

When I had to switch abruptly from teaching face-to-face lessons to teaching online with *Zoom*, I was drawn to the chat box for a couple of reasons. My students and I were all comfortable using it, so it seemed like there was nothing new to learn. And, besides sharing my screen, I didn't know how to use any of the other features of *Zoom*, so the chat box was all I had! It didn't take me long to discover what a useful, flexible tool it could be for my lessons with teens and adults.

The chat feature of *Zoom* can be opened by clicking 'Chat' in the meeting control bar, or 'More' when sharing your screen, which opens a chat window. When screen sharing, this window can be conveniently moved around, enlarged or reduced, depending on how you'd like it to appear on your screen, how many comments you'd like to see at once, how many other windows you have open, etc.

One nice thing about the *Zoom* chat feature is that all the comments stay there until the room is closed, even if you close the chat window and open it again, so you can still scroll back up to see a comment or correction made earlier in the lesson.

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The chat can even be saved to your computer, to refer to later or send to your students after the lesson is finished.

Brainstorming

Perhaps the most obvious way of exploiting the chat box is brainstorming. In practice, this ends up being similar to having all the students up at the board at once – but without stepping on each other's feet. It's fun to see words or ideas spilling out of the students' heads in real time. In my experience, chat box brainstorms work well as warmers or lead-ins, or even as the first test in a test–teach–test lesson, to see how many words the students already know from the lexical area you're planning to teach. An added bonus is that brainstorming often creates teaching opportunities – when, for example, a student spells a word incorrectly, or perhaps invents a word based on their L1.

Games

- One quick game to play involves displaying a picture of, say, a messy bedroom, and then giving the students a short time to write down in the chat box as many objects as they can see in the picture. A variation is to put up a picture for ten seconds or so and then take it away. Afterwards, the students write as many objects as they can remember in the chat box. The winner is the student with the most correctly-identified objects.
- Another easy game to play is one I like to call 'Private board'. It's like 'Backs to the board', but without the backs or the boards. First, use the chat box to send a private message to one student with a vocabulary item. That student then has to explain the word to the class, without actually using it. Mime is also possible, depending on the lexical area. A variation (without the chat box) is to put one student into a 'waiting room' (a setting where the student is outside the 'meeting' and can only rejoin when invited to do so by the 'host'), give the rest of the class a word, and then bring that one student back to guess the mystery word.

Questions with simple answers

The chat box works well for any question with a reasonably short answer. For example, I recently asked a group of teenagers *What are you doing at home to pass the time?* They wrote things in the chat box like *homework*, *Netflix*, *playing computer games*, *cooking*, etc. I was then able to ask follow-up questions based on their answers: *So, Javier, you said Netflix. Have you seen anything good recently? Anything you would recommend to your classmates?* This is a strategy I find myself employing often with reticent teens: using short answers from the chat box as a jumping-off point for further discussion. It works much better than asking the students questions out of the blue in open class. Plus, the questions themselves are more personalised.

Pictures

You can also combine your questions with pictures. In a recent class with adults, I put up a picture of a deciduous forest in autumn, together with the question: *How does this picture make you feel?* In the chat box, I got *calm*, *free*, *nostalgic*, *happy*, etc – another excellent jumping-off point for a nice discussion. To make the lesson more student-centred, you can also ask the students to display their own photos by sharing their screens – or to find a physical photo in their houses to show everyone on the webcam. In my experience, a piece of art can work just as well, or even better, than a photo for this type of activity.

CCQs

After introducing grammar or vocabulary, it's good practice to ask a few concept check questions (CCQs) to make sure the students have actually understood it. If these questions are answered by everyone at once in the chat box, you can get a quick feel for how well things are going and decide if there is still some teaching to do before moving on to the practice stage. When you think about it, there is no way of checking up on the whole class at once so easily and efficiently in a physical classroom.

Sending files

One useful feature of the chat box in *Zoom* is the 'send file' function. This can allow you to set up jigsaw reading or listening activities. It's also handy for sending the students questions or pictures to discuss in breakout rooms, because *Zoom* doesn't allow you to share your screen with all the breakout rooms at once. Note that PDFs work best, but be careful: for some reason, students working on mobile phones or tablets can't download files via the chat box – something I found out the hard way. Whenever possible, send important files by email before the lesson, as a backup.

Correct this sentence

A simple activity I've been using recently is to put up a sentence containing a mistake for everyone to correct in the chat box. You can have the students send you their messages privately if you don't want them to copy each other, but I find in practice that all the students are writing at once, so this doesn't end up being a problem. This activity works particularly well for revision.

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Ideally, everyone fires their correction into the chat box with lightning speed, but sometimes only a few odd answers drift in, one at a time. That's when you know that a language point is in need of a bit more revision.

On-the-spot error correction

The chat box is good for doing on-the-spot error correction without actually interrupting the students. This works equally well in open class or in breakout rooms. It's minimally distracting for the person talking, and it gets the correction out there for everyone to see. If you're worried about embarrassing a student, you can use the private message function to send the correction only to the student who made the mistake. When you are new to online teaching, it's easy to focus on the disadvantages. But this is one subtle form of correction that has no real equivalent in a physical classroom.

Plenary

One nice way of rounding off a lesson is to ask the students to tell you one or two things they learnt that day. In my normal classes, I have my students line up and write on the board or I give them individual sticky notes to use. On *Zoom*, the chat box makes this activity even faster and simpler.

A few words of warning

Unless you change the settings to prevent them from doing it, the students will have the ability to send private messages to each other through the *Zoom* chat box. This is an obvious problem with groups of young learners, who might be tempted to send each other silly, and possibly even inappropriate, messages. Personally, I've chosen to disable 'private chat' completely, which can be done by logging into the *Zoom* portal (*www.zoom.us*), going to 'My account', then 'Settings', and scrolling down until you see 'Private chat' (see below). However, if you are only working with adults, this private chat function could allow you to do activities where information is passed between individuals, who are perhaps in the same group or on the same team.

One issue I've had with teenagers is that sometimes they start playing silly games with the chat box, such as all typing the same letter, instead of paying attention to my lesson. Thankfully, this type of problem has a simple technological solution. If you don't like what's happening in the chat box, don't waste time acting annoyed and telling the students off – simply disable the chat box until you need it again. This can be done with the icon with three dots on the right-hand side of the chat box and selecting 'participants can chat with: no one'.

One last non-chat-related warning: *Zoom* has recently received some bad publicity about '*Zoom* bombing', where uninvited guests join rooms and wreak havoc. I've actually had the experience of strange people trying to join my lesson (I later found out they were students from another teacher's class), but it wasn't a problem because my school has activated a 'waiting room' for all our lessons. This way, the students are effectively in limbo until manually accepted into the room by the host. But if the possibility of *Zoom* bombing keeps you up at night, please see Russell Stannard's article on *Zoom* in Issue 128 of *ETp*, or his teacher training video on the topic: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzYWrkCD1uY&feature=youtu.be*.

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For those of us who are used to face-to-face teaching, moving online can feel like a very steep technological and methodological hill to climb at first. Everything seems new and unfamiliar. My advice is to keep it simple and take it slow. Start by trying to exploit simple functions like the chat box to do the same type of activities you would do in your classroom lessons. This will allow you and your students to gain confidence with the new medium – and, most importantly, get back to teaching the type of fun, engaging lessons you give in your normal classroom. ■

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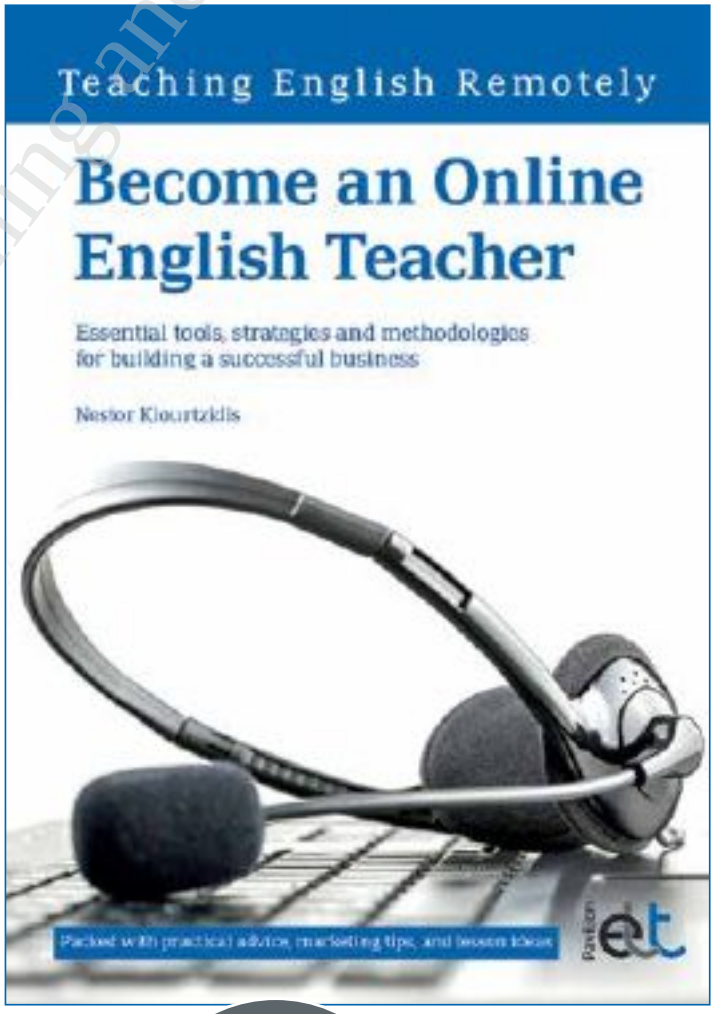

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Moving teenage classes online

Enda Scott
enthuses over the potential of online teaching.

Online learning and distance language courses are already well established. However, the restrictions imposed as a result of Covid-19 have seen many teachers moved from familiar face-to-face (f2f) classrooms to online synchronous environments at very short notice. Here are some reflections on my experiences with this changeover.

Initial challenges

Teachers may be familiar with digital materials, the use of certain sites in and outside the classroom, but having to move *existing* classes online provides a new challenge. It's like the beginning of the academic year all over again, with frantic attempts to find material, organise classrooms and potentially spend hours planning each lesson in a new and unfamiliar school. Initially, it may seem that hard-earned classroom experience and tricks have been thrown out of the window – but, in reality, many are transferable to an online context.

It is also, of course, a new experience for most *students*. The idea that students are 'digital natives' who are far more comfortable with new technologies than their teachers and who will adapt without problems is at best questionable. The reality is that many students still have limited IT skills, and their experience of using technology for learning may be restricted to downloading and completing worksheets or cutting and pasting information from *Google* searches. The use of hardware and software which is not up-to-date, and the difficulty of finding an adequate space to study in, must also be taken into account.

These are challenges indeed, but the good news is that they are surmountable and that learning, even enhanced learning, can take place. Here are some observations and recommendations.

Don't panic!

Firstly, if an existing f2f class is *moved* online, there is one immediate advantage over starting such a course from scratch: the teachers and the students already know each other, and many of the relationships, routines and general management techniques in place in the physical classroom can be replicated online. There may even be certain advantages to the changeover: working from home

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offers an opportunity for the students to behave as individuals and to be less intimidated by peer pressure. Issues with mixed abilities, early finishers, chatting and other distractions may also be diluted in an environment where the students are obliged to become more independent and responsible for their own learning, without losing the social aspect of being in class.

First steps

It is vital to become familiar with the platform being used and the basic tools the platform provides: chat boxes, breakout rooms, screen sharing, etc. These are essentially designed to replicate the f2f experience and, as a result, their application shouldn't prove that difficult. The internet is full of amazing resources, sites, apps, etc, but there will be plenty of time to explore these later. Teachers will gradually build up their own favourite arsenal of online 'goodies' but, when starting out, the priority should be to establish a working environment within which both students and teacher are comfortable.

General management

As in any f2f environment, the general organisation of the online class and how it is run is crucial. It may not be possible to allocate seating arrangements or ask the students to get their books out and place them under their seats, but there are equally important opening and closing routines necessary to make the online environment productive. From calling the attendance list, to checking that the students have the right materials, including their coursebooks, pencils and notebooks, microphones, webcams and a quiet working area, a series of checks and reminders will help keep the online class familiar and organised. A simple welcome routine where the students speak briefly, chat and bring each other up to date also aids a sense of unity – a similar routine can be equally important at the end of the lesson, so that it finishes on a positive note.

Consistency adds to the sense of being in a class. Providing an outline of what is going to be covered, or, at the end of the class, a summary of what has been done, the use of symbols to indicate the skills being focused on, consistency in the design of presentation slides, etc will ease the transfer to a virtual classroom and highlight the fact that this is simply an alternative to the physical classroom. It is important to demonstrate that the primary objective is to continue covering the given curriculum, etc; the technological environment is only a new way of doing this. Achieving and reinforcing this sense of familiarity provides a productive learning environment which, combined with the novelty of online opportunities, stimulates motivation and participation.

Setting up and organising activities

Effectively setting up activities is always a challenge, but more so online – initially, at least – when teachers are unable to see their students' reactions clearly, and evaluate whether or not they have understood. Clear, step-by-step stages, concept checking, the involvement of the students in explaining and demonstrating a task, remain vital. It is also more important than ever to provide both oral and visual input to compensate for the lack of classroom presence. Students also need adequate time to process what is being asked of them as, again, it is a new environment, and becoming at ease with how it works is a process which requires patience. As always, the more involved the students are in elaborating the instructions or explanations, the clearer they will be about what they have to do and, therefore, the more productive they will be when they do start. Matching activities, dictations, sending instructions in chat boxes, etc – and perhaps even audio or video recordings explaining the steps – are some of the tools that can be used.

It is worth remembering that, although students are 'home alone' as it were, pair-, group- and whole-class work is still both feasible and necessary. It may be even easier to manage, as there are fewer peer distractions and the students are under more pressure to perform as individuals.

As with any class, but again perhaps even more so online, variety and pace changing is essential. Sixty to 90 minutes is a long period to be glued to a screen, so breaks to allow some social chat, a quick video or a team game can all be positive ways of adding variety and maintaining the students' attention and motivation throughout. These breaks can be planned, but as teachers gain confidence with the new environment, they can be kept on hand and used when the mood or pace of the class requires a nudge, when it is the moment for a virtual 'stand up and move around' interval. Finally, once again, remember that things can take a lot longer to do online, especially at the beginning. In order to build confidence, the students will need adequate time to prepare and process; rushing will only generate confusion and frustration.

Correction and feedback

When it comes to correction and feedback, the first step again is to check the tools available on the platform being used. Chat, polls, breakout rooms, the virtual whiteboard and shared spaces can easily be exploited to replicate many traditional correction and feedback methods. The new environment may even give old ideas and techniques a new lease of life. Using a chat box is an interesting way to correct while someone is speaking. Indeed, the chat box can become a type of live whiteboard as the teacher adds comments or vocabulary during any activity. Randomly choosing students to respond keeps everyone on their toes and means participation is potentially more democratic and distributed than in f2f classes where, for different reasons, certain students may try to dominate. Teams, points, rewards and competitive opportunities are very simple to include, just as they are in a standard class.

In reality, it is surprising how similar life online can be, and enhancing that familiarity boosts student participation and a sense of comfort. Asynchronous feedback will also be necessary, so if the platform you are using doesn't allow file sharing, through which the students can download documents and upload their work, you may want to explore the opportunities an additional platform such as *Google Classroom* offers. What is interesting to remember is that once a file-sharing system is established, audio and video material can be exchanged just as easily as text documents – and a new world suddenly opens up for oral and visual presentations and feedback. If this is already being done in f2f classes, moving online speeds up the process and enriches such exchanges.

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Specific advantages

There are ways in which online teaching may score over traditional f2f teaching. For example, the students may focus more on the coursebook material, with fewer distractions or the temptation to copy. In addition, some f2f activities may gain a new lease of life online. Here are some examples:

- Any kind of task requiring the students to search for information and exchange their findings with their classmates.
- Online treasure hunts, designed by the teacher or the students themselves.
- Oral presentations: the students are motivated to produce better-quality presentations, and their colleagues are motivated to listen more carefully without classroom distractions.
- Jigsaw-type activities, including reading and listening, where individuals or groups do different tasks and collaborate later to share their experiences and results.

Discipline

The students may have fewer distractions if they are in a quiet environment with fewer opportunities for chatting, playing the class clown or hiding behind the work of a stronger student. Having said that, there is also potential for abuse. Check the controls on your platform to limit or monitor the use of private chat and shared notes 'behind the teacher's back'.

Occasionally, certain students may use the online context or technology as an excuse not to work (*I have no microphone* or *I can't use email to send homework*). In general, normal procedures can be applied, and it may prove necessary to call the parents about their child's participation if a student really doesn't get involved – and of course about anything more serious. However, in general:

- Be observant.
- Establish clear rules for the running of the online class. Your students will even get a kick out of being involved in writing them. Reminding the students of these rules at the beginning of each class keeps them in mind, and returning to them at the end may also serve as reinforcement.
- Points and other reward systems from f2f classes can easily be translated online.
- As always, deal with potential problems swiftly, and ideally on an individual level: a reminder or call to attention in a private chat, or even holding a student back after class finishes, may be all that is needed.

Moving forward

Having established the basics of working with students online and discovering how traditional classrooms become changed but not totally different, it may then be time to explore some of a wide range of online options available and feed them gradually into the framework that has been established. My recommendation is to try anything new slowly, without being overly ambitious – and also to be prepared to try it out more than once before fully evaluating its potential. Once something new has become familiar, it quickly evolves into another tool to be incorporated when planning, or simply to be used during class when a change of pace is needed. There are hundreds of resources out there: use *them* rather than letting them use *you*.

Finally, as everyone gains confidence, there will be more and more opportunities to explore flipping the online classroom and encouraging the students to develop their research, evaluation and presentation skills. Increased learner autonomy can be encouraged, using a step-by-step process of exploring, consolidating and developing.

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Moving f2f classes online is challenging, but not impossible by any means. The process, in fact, can be highly profitable for all involved, and will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on all our teaching. What is more, I'm convinced that, whatever the future holds, the experiences of f2f teaching in online environments will provide a rich source of input for the future development of online teaching and blended learning in general. ■

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Food, glorious food!

Michelle Ocriciano finds a feast of ideas for online classes.

I was born and raised in Brazil in an Italian family, and cooking has always been part of my life – so much so that my best memories involve the kitchen and my mother and grandmother cooking. In 2014, my partner and I moved to Australia, where I was lucky to land a job as a teacher after only two weeks in the country. After the first few weeks of teaching in Australia, I realised that food was the new tool that I was going to use to build rapport and get to know my international students. Since then, food has become my staple topic, and I have even cooked in an IELTS preparation class. In my classes, whenever we have some time, we talk about food. I give the students the time to explain recipes, discuss cooking methods and show pictures. The students enjoy it greatly, and so do I. I can see their faces light up, and their engagement is almost tangible. At first, these occasions seemed little more than 'good lessons'. It was only when I received an email from one class that I realised how *important* this type of lesson was. The students wrote that, for the first time, they had felt welcomed and that they thought they themselves and their culture were important – and also that they had a voice.

Food and society

When international students leave their home country, or when people simply move to another city or even another part of town, they usually go through a process of trying to integrate to the new place, and food is a part of this process. Apart from its nourishing aspects, food is used by families and groups to teach behaviour and show what is appropriate and inappropriate in specific settings. Eating and feeding practices can highlight how they are anchored to social position. A good example of this is how Pierre Bourdieu describes the correspondence between taste and social position: food can consciously or unconsciously be used in attitudes and processes of stratification, that is, unequal access to desired resources. This lack of access can lead to exclusion and distinction of members in a given population. In other words, what and how we eat can be used by others to define who we are, what we deserve and where we fit in within society. For this reason, teachers should not dismiss the importance of the role food plays in education.

Food and emotions

Food connects people, and the act of cooking, sharing or providing food can potentially lead to empathy and broaden interpersonal closeness. Food is also closely related to emotion regulation, the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions. Recent research suggests that when offering food, the provider is not only trying to make the receiver feel better, but also themselves. Therefore, as Myrte Hamburg and her colleagues put it, food offering *'becomes a means to increase positive affect for both recipient and – when the offer has the desired effect – provider'*.

There is a growing body of research that discusses food and its effects on the body. One of the effects of food consumption is how its physiological properties affect mood by means of the body's chemical messengers, called neurotransmitters. Research in psychology and cognition argues that eating can decrease feelings of helplessness and depression, and increase feelings of joy. Most importantly, as Julie Locher and her colleagues claim, food has the power to enhance positive feelings by its associations with certain situations and contexts.

Food and lessons

Inspired by the *Facebook* group 'ELT Footprint', I have been trying to bring more topics related to the environment and more sustainable living into my lessons. The following are some suggestions on topics related to food:

- Access to food
- Conscious food-buying habits
- Food and water access
- Genetically modified food
- Packaging and over-packaging
- Reuse of food waste, scraps and leftovers

Other topics could also include food as medicine, the 'slow cooking' movement, eating healthily on a budget, eating habits, eating disorders, festival food, food ethics, food-shaming, hunger and whole food versus processed food.

Teachers can also have a more directive approach and focus on vocabulary about ingredients, cooking methods and preparations, kitchen tools and appliances, food idioms, and adjectives to describe food. There is also the language for giving/following instructions, imperative forms, quantifiers, words for measuring things, food ordering, restaurant booking, comparatives and superlatives and compare and contrast.

Students from the same country, or those who share the same cultural background, can still engage in the discovery of food. Different areas may have different names and/or different

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preparation for similar dishes. Discussing these issues is a great opportunity for the students to talk about their own culture and also to introduce a discussion on the standards of English, World Englishes and language variation. Simple examples can be short vocabulary lists comparing two different varieties of English, or the different functions of politeness.

Food and online lessons

One of the benefits of teaching online is that each teacher and student is in their own home, with access to their own cooking facilities. To use that to your advantage, consider a whole-school project with different teachers teaching different levels and getting together in the last part of the lesson for a cooking class. This can be done regularly, with one teacher showing one recipe at a time. Once the students are comfortable with the format, consider asking them to conduct a cooking demonstration themselves. They can even prepare the entire lesson together, including the vocabulary presentation. If this idea suits you and the other members of staff, make sure to ask the students and check if they feel comfortable doing it. Don't just assign it!

Another idea is the creation of a school cookbook with recipes that are special to the students and staff. The cookbook can include stories explaining why those particular recipes are meaningful. It is a great opportunity for some creative and meaningful writing. There are many digital tools that can be used as a depository, such as *Padlet*. If you are feeling more adventurous, try creating a real cookbook with a free digital magazine maker such as *FlipHTML5* and share it with all the students in the school or even the wider community, such as the neighbourhood around the school.

My food lesson

I constantly use the game 'Two truths one lie' when getting to know my students. One of the truths that I use is *I always make and eat pizza on Friday nights*. This generates a lot of conversation about food and culture, and I end up baking pizza at home and bringing it to class the next day. Because of Covid-19, sharing pizza is not possible at the moment, so I decided to show my students how to make *pizzette* from my kitchen. Pizzette is just a small pizza with a slightly different dough which is easier to make and handle. This is my grandmother's recipe and it is certainly not difficult. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do, but if you already have a recipe you trust, go ahead and use that.

Procedure

The first time I met my students, they learnt that I love to make my own pizza, and they asked me to teach them. The following is a description of what I did in my online lesson.

1 Before class

- I wrote eight questions about food. I then created four different documents using *Google Docs* and pasted two questions in each. After that, I clicked on the *Google Docs* 'document share' button, copied the links and added those to my lesson plan.
- I made a list of the vocabulary items the students would need for the lesson and separated them into categories with equal numbers of items. One list was about ingredients and the other procedures and equipment.
- Using *Zoom*, I recorded myself dictating each set of words separately. I chose the option 'save in the cloud' and copied the links to my lesson plan.
- I found pictures to correspond to the items in my two vocabulary lists on *Pixabay*, a free online image database, and put the pictures in two separate documents. I then saved the documents to my account on *Google Drive* and copied the links of both documents to my lesson plan.
- I prepared the ingredients for small pizzette (see the box on the next page) and placed them in small bowls. (As the dough needs to rest for two hours, I made a batch in advance.)

2 During class

- To introduce the topic of food, I assigned the students randomly to *Zoom* breakout rooms and used the chat box to send a link to one of my sets of questions to each student. (I didn't want each student to have access to all the questions.)
- Each group was given ten minutes to discuss the questions in their breakout rooms. I visited every room and monitored each group for around two minutes.
- I then brought the students back to the main room to share with the whole class some of the ideas they had discussed. I told them I was going to demonstrate how to make small pizzas, called pizzette, and asked what they needed to follow the recipe. They replied they needed to know the ingredients. I then separated them in two groups, A and B. I shared via the chat box the links to my recording of the dictation of the list of ingredients and the corresponding pictures with Group A. I sent Group B the links to my dictation of the words for the procedures and equipment and the corresponding pictures. The students listened to their different recordings and tried to match the words and pictures.
- I then put the students into pairs, A and B, in breakout rooms, and sent the A students the document with the pictures that the B students had received, and vice versa. Student A asked their partner the word for the first picture. Student B replied, and Student A asked Student B to spell the word. Then Student B asked Student A the word for their first picture, and so on, until they had been through all the words.
- Back in the main room, I elicited the recipe and the instructions and went to the kitchen. I showed the students the ingredients and elicited what I had to do, and we 'cooked together', although we were apart. I portioned and rolled out the dough, and the students decided on the toppings. In the ten minutes while the small pizzette were baking, we talked about *their* favourite recipes and they gave me tips on how to make the perfect dumpling.
- When the pizzette were ready, I showed them to the students and we went back to the 'classroom'. For homework, the students had to share a recipe of their own, with ingredients and instructions, making a brief comment about why this recipe was particularly important to them. Half the class wanted to do the activity as a group and the other half wrote individually. As a result, the students and I now have 13 great new recipes to try.

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Pizzette recipe

Ingredients

500 grams flour
250 ml milk
50 ml olive oil
7 grams yeast
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar

For toppings, use your favourite tomato sauce recipe and top the small pizzas with anything you like that is available. My favourite is mozzarella cheese and basil leaves.

Method

Mix up everything for the dough and let it rest for two hours. Divide the dough into nine or 12 equal portions. Make small flat discs of dough and prick them with a fork. Add your favourite toppings and bake for around ten minutes at 180 degrees.

Final tips

Send the recipe to the students in advance – some might try to cook live with you.

If you are going to cook *anything* with your students, make sure you choose a recipe that:

- is simple and easy;
- is fast or can be broken into steps;
- has few ingredients;
- has ingredients that the students are not allergic to;
- you really know how to cook.

Before the cooking demonstration:

- test the video conferencing device you are going to use;
- test the positioning of the device: most of the time, the students should see your hands and the ingredients. I put my laptop on a big bowl, placed upside down on the kitchen counter.
- make sure the students can see and hear;
- make sure your batteries are fully charged;
- prepare your tools and ingredients.

♦ ♦ ♦

In a nutshell, my aim with the pizzette class was to build rapport with my students and offer them a skill to assist with the management of anxiety. To do this, as I teach a high-stakes university EAP course with a very prescriptive curriculum, I deliberately skipped activities so I could cook with the students. I am not suggesting you do the same, all I am asking is – especially right now in the Covid-19 crisis – that you be inspired by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and remember that emotions do affect learning. As teachers, we have a duty of care, and we are in a position to assist our students in navigating this weird process.

Consider emotions and wellbeing first and then curriculum: basically, Maslow before Bloom (Maslow's hierarchy of needs before Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives). As we discover and adapt to the 'new normal', give food some thought and consider using it in your next classes. ■

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Another way with SWOT

Ruth Little applies a business analysis to general language skills.

I have recently heard many business English trainers talking about how they use a SWOT analysis in the classroom. For those of you who aren't familiar with this, it is a tool used to analyse businesses for their potential. The initials stand for: *Strengths*, *Weaknesses*, *Opportunities* and *Threats*.

Trainers often use this in business English courses by, for example, asking the students to apply it to their own company or a fictional company. It is a good way of expanding their vocabulary in a realistic setting, such as creating a roleplay meeting or discussion.

However, I have discovered that the analysis can be applied to anything, and I have found it very profitable as an activity at the start of a course. It can be used for any type of English course, not just a business one, and can be adapted to any level.

Procedure

I give out a template – basically a grid of four boxes, labelled *Strengths*, *Weaknesses*, *Opportunities* and *Threats* – and explain what a SWOT analysis is and what the initials stand for, if the students don't already know. Then I explain that this analysis will apply to their English skills, and I ask them to jot down a few notes in each square.

Strengths

I ask them to note what they can do well. Students often focus on what they *can't* do or what they feel they do *badly*, so asking them to think about their strengths can help them to build confidence.

Weaknesses

I formulate this as what they would like to *improve*, rather than talking about weaknesses, which is rather negative. They will have discussed this in their intake interviews, but it is useful for them to talk about it at the start of the course, as I can then help them to formulate objectives for the course. Also, if this takes place in class, it reduces insecurities: the students may hear that others have similar 'weaknesses', or find out that others are less confident about skills that they themselves are strong in. It is also useful for me to hear what the students would particularly like to improve, because they often pinpoint different skills from those they mentioned in their intake interviews!

Opportunities

I ask the students to note down any opportunities they have to practise their English outside the classroom. This is an opportunity for me to gently make them aware that they need to do more than just attend the course sessions if they want to make a significant improvement to their skills. It is also a chance for me to give them ideas and tips on how to practise. Many of them say that they will start reading an English book, because that is what they did at school. However, if they are not in the habit of reading in their own language, they won't keep this up in English. I introduce them to the idea of reading magazines, internet articles, newspapers or websites, and assure them that these do 'count'.

I also tell them that listening is just as useful for vocabulary expansion as it is for improving listening skills, and I suggest podcasts, audio books and internet radio as possibilities, pointing out that they can listen while doing other things. I invite them to share tips, apps and useful websites with the rest of the class.

Threats

Here, I ask the students to make a note of anything that might hinder their progress. I tell them that everyone mentions 'lack of time' as a threat, so that they are aware that this is a problem for everyone and that they need to make a commitment to the course. Another example that I usually mention is that some people are afraid of speaking because they don't want to make mistakes. By bringing this out into the open, anyone who is shy of speaking feels that they will be supported. I then invite the students to share their 'threats' with me and the rest of the class. It is very helpful for them to hear that others may struggle with the same difficulties that they themselves do, and it gives them more confidence as they start the course.

Here is an example from one of my students:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Reading and listening	Speaking and writing
Opportunities	**Threats**
Read English books / magazines / internet sites Listening – podcasts, apps Speak to English colleagues	Frightened to speak

♦ ♦ ♦

I find that this activity works extremely well for the first lesson of a course. It can focus the students' attention on their goals at the outset, as well as on what they need to do to achieve them – and what possible obstacles they might meet along the way. Done with a class, it serves as a bonding exercise to help the students feel supported as members of a group and by the teacher. However, it also works well in a one-to-one lesson. Finally, it helps me as a teacher by giving me invaluable information on which to build the rest of the course. ■

Ruth Little started her career in Italy as a freelance teacher of adults. She is now based in the Netherlands, where she teaches business English and exam preparation courses and gives workshops on exam preparation courses for new teachers.

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NEW

Structuring Fun for Young Learners in the ELT Classroom

Practical ideas and advice for teaching English to children to engage and inspire them throughout their primary schooling

New from Chris Roland, *Structuring Fun for Young Learners in the ELT Classroom* is full of lesson ideas, exercises and tips for teaching English as a foreign language to young learners.

When fun in the classroom is properly structured, everyone is a winner. Your students will remember those activities for years – and you'll be able to cover your course content without compromising on classroom management.

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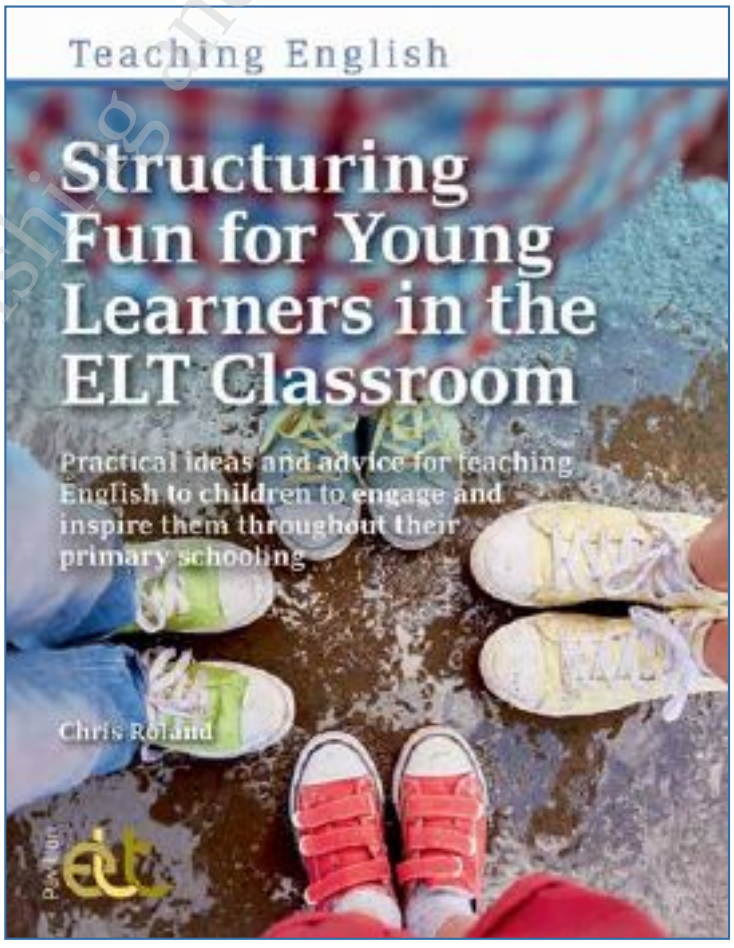
Structuring Fun for Young Learners in the ELT Classroom covers all of these fundamentals and explores movement, text, space, novelty objects, teacher-student dialogue, personalisation, clips, images, support for learners, use of coursebooks and your own professional development as a young learner teacher.

Chris Roland



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Pavilion ELT

Managing online fun

Chris Roland sees the advantages of teaching online – with a structured and supportive approach.

In any young learner class, be it face-to-face or remote, if you have children bouncing up and down in their chairs because they are eager to answer a question, or leaning forward on the edge of those chairs to see what you are going to write or say or show them, then you have the potential for a memorable time together. If you can *structure* that eagerness, giving it shape and centring activity on increased familiarity with, and production of, words and sentences in English, you have all the makings of a successful lesson.

In this article, we will look at how, whilst not needing to depart from the basic principles of learning we are familiar with, we can make the most of some characteristics of online teaching, as well as manage one or two issues that the new medium might throw up.

The elements of an online lesson

On most online platforms, we have three main elements. There is a central display area to be used as a whiteboard, to display a *PowerPoint* presentation or to show the pages of digital books. There is a box where the learners can see a video image of the teacher, where the teacher can see their own image (and perhaps images of the learners). Finally, there is a chat box.

Personally, I love the fact that I have a chat box. Not only does it act as a safety net for when the teacher's spoken instructions have been forgotten (for example, we can double up by typing in the coursebook page number the learners need to turn to, as well as saying it) but it is also another opportunity to increase the learners' exposure to the written form of words.

Providing support

No learner is ever going to enjoy a lesson if they are stressed. Nobody enjoys stress. Overloading young learners by asking them to type in too many full-length responses or unfamiliar words in the chat box will create stress. On the other hand, we still want to have our learners process as much text as possible – especially half-familiar items that they are in the process of assimilating. The following is a simple solution.

On the beach

This week I have been working on a set of beach activities with my seven and eight year olds (mostly taken from Carol Read and Mark Ormerod's *New Tiger 3*) that includes *building sandcastles*, *swimming in the sea*, *snorkelling*, *lying in the shade*, *putting sun cream on* and *playing with a bat and a ball*. My learners already recognise the picture flashcards and word cards, but have not practised writing the phrases yet. Typing out these items in full would be too much for most of them, but if I type *b_ilding sandcastles* into the chat box, they can easily type in a one-letter response, so the exchange looks like this:

T: b_ilding sandcastles
S4: u
S9: u
S2: u
S7: u

Here, I have taken the strain off my learners, allowing them to respond quickly, which will maintain dynamism, even though this is a text-based portion of the class. By choosing my missing letters carefully, I can also draw attention to specific spelling features. Additionally, all this time, the learners are increasing their whole-word recognition of these items. In terms of differentiation, the more advanced typers in the class may decide to provide the whole word or phrase anyway, and that is fine too – in fact, I leave this option open to every learner.

Finally, I can provide an additional layer of support by prompting the learners to have their coursebooks open at the page where all the items are introduced with thumbnail pictures. In general, the best motto when it comes to online teaching with young learners is: *Support, support and more support.*

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Daily routines

This extends to working from the central display area. In the activity shown in picture 1, the children were trying to guess the activity from my rather questionable sketches. This time, we were working on a very familiar set of phrases for daily routines.

As the language was well known, I did ask for full sentences, but still provided various layers of support. Firstly, I wrote up and said the time (which was actually a primer for the end of the particular unit they were on, particular to my own context, and the reason the time appears twice). Then I began to draw. Any student who was able to guess at this point could type a full sentence into the chat box: *I go to school at 7.00*. In this scenario, because I was busy drawing for some time, the children had longer to prepare their sentences. In addition, those who might have struggled to put the sentence together had their faster colleagues' offerings to use as a guide.

The support continued. When I had finished the drawing, I wrote in the sentence myself. The learners who still had not put the sentence together could now use this as guide, typing in the very same sentence that I had written, whilst I turned my attention to the chat box and acknowledged the answers that had come in so far.

Guessing games

Regular readers of *ETp* may remember the set of toy animals I mentioned in Issue 110. Using these online is in some ways even easier to manage, because when we hold a model up to the camera, everyone in the class can see it easily. In fact, in this aspect, online teaching has an advantage over classroom lessons as we can show any small object to all our students at once.

Guess the animal

The game shown in picture 2 is a simple guessing game from clues. The teacher enters a short text into the chat box while at the same time reading it out. For example:

It's got wings and feathers.

It's got an orange beak and orange feet.

The children then get to see a close-up of the model, wrapped in tinfoil or even inside a sock if you do not wish to be wasteful. They can type in the animal that they think it is.

I hope you can see that the activities so far are very close to what we might do in regular face-to-face classes and are very quick and easy to set up.

Class mascots

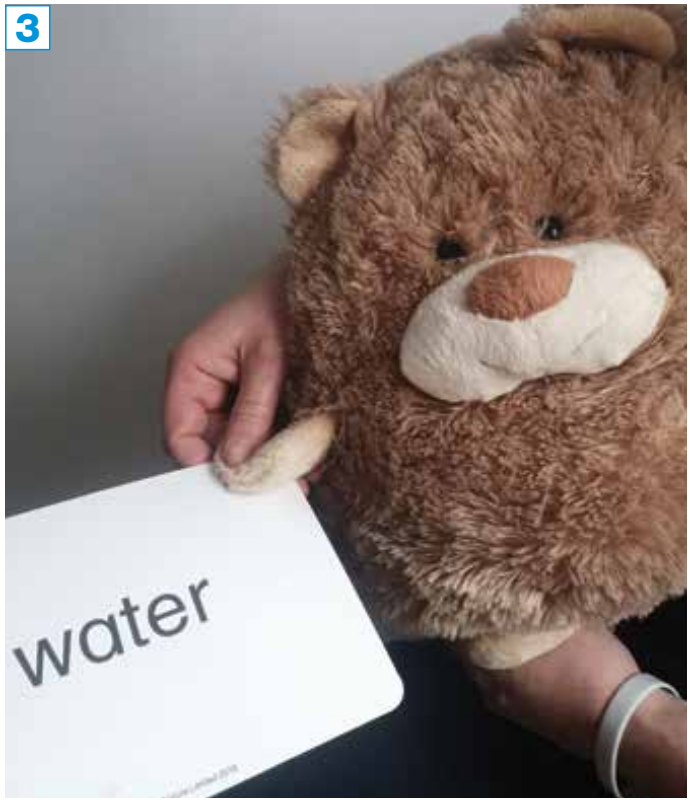
Class mascots such as dolls, puppets and cuddly toys might cause squabbles when we are all in a classroom together, but when teaching remotely, *nobody* gets to hold them, so they can play a more prominent part in lessons. It also means that you can use that teddy bear you have had since you were four or the fluffy unicorn your best friend bought you on holiday – pieces that you might not otherwise risk taking in to school.

Food for Henry

In picture 3, you can see Henry, a ball of cuteness that my partner and I have been using with our students for a number of years.

At the end of the 'guess the activity' drawing, the learners also had the language they needed to produce their own sentences.

'Guess the animal' activity



Incorporating class mascots is easier online

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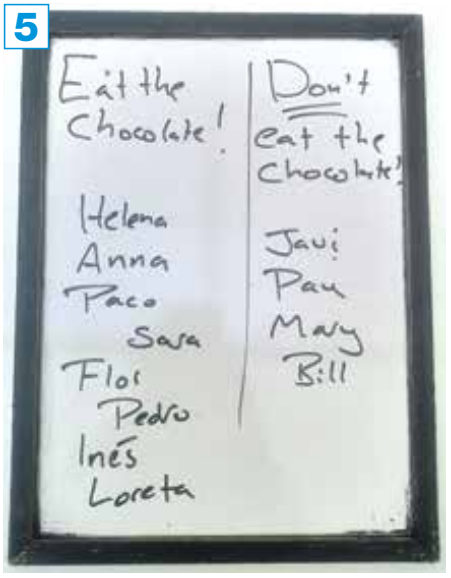
4

Would you eat this chocolate?

5



Here, old technology complements new, as we keep a record of votes on a mini-board

6

A little fun with foodstuffs

In this activity, the learners are asked to guess what food Henry would like. They can choose anything from the current set of food items we are studying. Their script is:

Henry, do you want [+ food item]?

I then pick up the corresponding word card or flashcard, checking with the student whose turn it is that I have the right one. I offer it to Henry, who either shakes his head, or nods and takes the food item off me. Henry usually only nods his head when we are getting to the end of the set of flashcards, although occasionally he will accept the first or second item offered to him – but still be hungry, so the activity can go on – in order to avoid predictable patterns.

So what are we actually doing here? We are doing nothing more than asking our learners to try to remember the food vocabulary we have already covered (we are also giving those who can't another look at the language). Everything else is adornment – but it is cute, low-prep adornment that will help the language stick.

Foodstuffs

One particular advantage of teaching remotely from home is that we have at our disposal the entire contents of our fridge and food cupboards. If we buy our food from the same supermarkets as our students' parents do, which I imagine is reasonably likely, then here we have the opportunity to expand our students' lexis on the topic, in a meaningful way, beyond the core vocabulary of our coursebook or syllabus.

Food I like/dislike

Prior to the lesson, I grab four or five items from my pantry and display them one by one to my students via the webcam. I say the word for each one and type it into the chat box. Then each student gets to respond with *I like ...* or *I don't like ...* .

In my last lesson, I showed them mustard, gherkins, tinned fish and a chocolate in a shiny wrapper. With some flexibility, we can allow our responses to be reactive here by providing individual students with additional scripts, as and when the situation arises (most likely when they tell us in their L1). Such language might be: *I don't mind ...*, *I've never tried ...*, *I'm allergic to ...* and *I can't stand ...* .

Taking a vote

I decided to unwrap the chocolate mentioned above (see picture 4) and, to all our surprise, the surface of it had faded, as chocolate tends to do over time.

Again, we went 'offroad' and had an improvised lesson stage. My students each voted as to whether I should still eat the chocolate. For a vote to count, I insisted they produce a full sentence, which was either *Eat the chocolate, teacher!* or *Don't eat the chocolate!*

I recorded their votes manually on a mini-whiteboard (see picture 5), holding it up for the children to see and, on this occasion, the consensus was that I should eat the chocolate. For the following class, I engineered a similar situation, having prepared a special 'green egg'.

To make my green egg (see pictures 6, 7 and 8), I adapted a procedure that the Chinese use to make marbled tea eggs, replacing the tea with food colouring. (As a sidenote, tea has a mild antibacterial effect, whereas the food colouring solution does not, so I let the egg soak for a few hours, rather than overnight as per the traditional recipe.)

Obviously this was a short novelty portion of the class, but when the students see that there is going to be a very real outcome that results from giving their opinion, they are happier to reformulate their previous one-word offerings, such as *No* or *Yes*, into full sentences, such as *Eat the egg! Don't eat the egg!* or, if we want to introduce a modal, *I think you should eat the egg!* or *I don't think you should eat the egg!*

There are a couple of key principles at work here. The first is that when the enthusiasm comes from the students, the teacher has control. The second is that for those students, giving an opinion, even if it does only involve choosing between two predetermined options, is always more engaging than being told exactly what to say. If you are not an egg person, or if you are teaching in a country where tea eggs are a common sight, and so not likely to arouse much curiosity, your students could always vote on whether or not you take a bite of a burnt piece of toast or eat a strange combination of food, such as a strawberry with peanut butter on it.

Getting away from food altogether, the students could decide what colour

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You can arouse curiosity with something your students do not see every day

clothes you are going to wear in the next lesson or, indeed, if they can see each other, choose a predominant colour or specific item of clothing for everyone to wear next time.

Using chat boxes

The beauty of the chat box means that we can play our learners a *YouTube* clip and provide comments or questions on it without needing to pause the action. For this to work, a little priming is necessary. I say to my students: *If you keep answering the questions in the chat box, I won't stop the clip.*

Preparing set messages

At some point, you may find that your chat box fills up with too much 'noise' – students typing in random strings of letters or chains of emojis. Much of my classroom management is done between lessons, and so when this happens, I prepare a set message for the following day, which I display in the chat box area right at the start of the lessons. This was a recent one, which I provided in both English and my learners' L1:

> *Hi everyone! Girls, boys, mums, dads and older brothers or sisters. To start with, can I ask you all to please remember that the chat box is only for answers to the teacher. It is not for students to send messages to each other or for typing long chains of letters or words. Thanks!*

I have a bank of these, saved as a *Word* document, so that I can copy and paste them during the lesson if a reminder is needed, all in English and in my students' L1. I also have a series of pre-written messages addressing any technology issues that seem to recur, and I most recently used one of these set opening messages to explain how we were all going to mute our microphones during certain portions of the class according to my instructions. The particular technological issues you have will depend upon the platform you are using and your group profiles, as will the dynamic and mode in which you wish your students to employ their microphones.

Tailoring your own set messages, and having them at the ready, can save you a great deal of time and tension, and allow you to focus on enjoying your lesson and reacting to the language content of the majority of your students' contributions, rather than getting sidetracked by individual tech problems or the one child who is going crazy on their keyboard.

♦ ♦ ♦

I hope that your online classes are productive, and I hope that you manage to enjoy them along the way. It is worth remembering that if *you* do, then your students most probably will too. ■

Read, C and Ormerod, M *New Tiger 3* Macmillan 2018

Chris Roland is a trainer based at ELI, a language academy in Seville, Spain, where he teaches young learners, teens and adult groups. He tutors on the Trinity Diploma course for OxfordTEFL and his most recent methodology book *Structuring Fun for Young Learners in the ELT Classroom* is published by Pavilion.

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Online classes for preschoolers

Riccardo Chiappini offers ten tips.

Because of the Covid-19 lockdown situation, many schools have had to move all their classes online. This is also the case with classes for preschoolers. If you are teaching children from age three to five online, you will know how different it is from working within the comfort of your classroom's four walls. Nonetheless, you and your colleagues will no doubt have taken the situation as an opportunity to roll up your sleeves and show how creative and resourceful you can be in making online learning as fruitful and fun as possible, even for your youngest pupils.

Here are my ten tips for teaching preschoolers online.

Fairy wings

Child with fairy wings

Home-made superhero cape

1 Make it loud and proud!

Use trumpets and air horns, silly clown noses and fancy dress costumes. Invite your students to do the same. The parents might want to skip wearing costumes, but they could be encouraged to help their children make a pair of cardboard fairy wings in preparation for your fairy tales, or cut a superhero's cape out of an old blanket for your superhero stories. Don't forget to shriek when you're miming a parrot or make a voice for each of the characters in the story you're reading. Both children and parents will surely appreciate the effort!

2 Make and use visuals.

It is always important to use visual as well as aural stimuli to capture the attention of small children, and this is even more so now that they have to be in front of a screen.

Use big pictures and posters. For teaching the vocabulary for animals and places on a farm, for example, stick a big picture, poster or drawing of a farm on the wall behind you. Elicit the target words using flashcards, and stick them in the right place on the poster (eg *horse* on *barn*, *piglet* on *pigsty*, etc) – or in the wrong place, so that the children can correct you.

If you're missing the flashcards for a given set of vocabulary, you can create them yourself and customise them according to the type of language you want your pupils to practise: describing size (*big/small*, *tiny/gigantic*), colours (*black/white*, *bright/dark*), etc.

Here are some nice flashcard activities that work well for online classes with preschoolers:

- *Slow reveal:* Take a picture flashcard and place the back of another flashcard in front of it so that the picture is concealed. Then slowly slide the picture up bit by bit and encourage the children to shout out the word it represents as soon as they identify it. To give the activity a more lively twist, you could *flash* the card, showing the picture for just a second or so, instead of slowly revealing it.
- *Guess what I can see:* Make the most of your flashcards by eliciting phrases and sentences as well as individual words. Hold a deck of flashcards so that only you can see the first

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one. Tell the children they have to guess the word, phrase or sentence that matches the flashcard you are looking at. The first child who raises their hand gets the chance to guess the word, phrase or sentence. With a set of flashcards representing musical instruments, for example, as well as practising indefinite articles and individual items (*a piano*, *an oboe*), the children could be pushed to produce sentences and questions, such as *She is playing the piano*, *Is she playing the guitar? Is it a flute?* etc.

- *Yes. No. What?* Even with simple words like *blue*, *chocolate* or *cake*, you can get children to produce positive, negative and interrogative structures. To elicit affirmative sentences, show the flashcard as you would normally do and elicit, for example, *I like chocolate*. For the children to produce the negative, show the flashcard upside down, eliciting *I don't like chocolate*. And for the interrogative, show the flashcard turned 90º, left or right: *Do you like chocolate?*

Instead of spending money ordering a book you don't have for your storytelling sessions, check if a reading of it is available online. There are quite a few nice animated or 'read aloud' books shown on *YouTube*. To use these effectively, share your screen with all the participants, mute the audio and scroll the timeline backwards and forwards as you read it yourself from the screen. If you do have a copy of the book, though, remember to hold it up where everyone can see it. And keep it still!

3 Continue using TPR.

Attending and teaching classes online means that children, parents and teachers don't need to think twice about making themselves at home. So take pride in sporting your most comfortable outfit for Total Physical Response activities. Instead of sitting on your chair or sofa, try sitting on the floor. Make sure that you have some clear space around you to perform your movements, and invite the children and their parents to join in. They can copy your dance moves, mime words or entire songs, run to the left or right and jump twice, etc. As in a normal face-to-face class, alternate sitting/reflecting time with TPR/*move-your-body* time in your online classes, too.

4 Encourage arts and crafts.

You will probably want to set aside some of your class time for the children to do activities in which they make something. First, be realistic. There are things children can do at school but not at home, for obvious reasons: not everyone will have all the right materials.

Start by having the final product ready to show the children and their parents, so they can see what they will be making. Well before running any arts and crafts sessions in class, though, make sure you've emailed the instructions you'll be giving to the parents, along with a list of the supplies (and possible substitutes) that they will need to do the activity.

Here's a short list of fun arts and crafts activities you could do with your preschoolers online:

- *'A Little Stuck' tree collage*: (*A Little Stuck*, by Oliver Jeffers, is a short story about a boy who gets his kite stuck in a tree. He keeps throwing things at a tree to

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release it, but everything he throws at it just keeps getting stuck.) Children make their own 'A Little Stuck' tree by gluing paper, sweet wrappers, tissues or whatever else they have to an outline of a tree, in order to make objects that get stuck on their tree.

- *Maracas:* You can make noisy maracas out of yoghurt pots and dry beans. To make one maraca, the children will need two clean yoghurt pots (or other plastic food containers), lots of dry beans, rice or anything else that will rattle, and sticky tape (or tinfoil). Put the beans in one yoghurt pot. Then tape (or tinfoil) the other yoghurt pot onto the one with the beans inside.
- *Explorer's tools:* You can turn the simplest thing in the world (like empty toilet paper rolls) into a pair of cool binoculars. Children decorate the rolls (with paint, crayons or stickers). Then, they glue or, if helped by a parent, staple the two rolls together. Older children who can already handle scissors and tie knots could make their binoculars even more professional by poking two tiny holes into the sides and tying on a piece of string.

5 Help the parents as much as you can.

As the children are so young, it will inevitably be the parents who have to prepare in advance for their children's class, so you need to give them all the help you can.

Keep the parents regularly informed: email them your week's plan, the aims of each lesson, and information about how the children are going to achieve these aims. This will translate into less stress for *them* but also for *you*. Besides saving you precious time at the beginning of a lesson (which you would otherwise be spending explaining what you are all going to do and what materials they'll have to use), keeping the parents up to date with the programme will also save you from losing your students' attention before even venturing into the first activity.

As well as receiving a clear calendar and information about the content of the lessons, the parents (just like their children) will benefit from knowing your class routine. Do establish one and stick to it. Once they have got used to it, the children will find it easier to *follow* your lessons, and their parents will find it easier to *prepare* for your lessons.

6 Remember that the children are your main audience.

Some teachers feel so threatened by the presence of their students' parents that they can end up engaging more with them than with the children – when explaining an activity, for example. Establish a communication pattern with the children, similar to the one you've already established for your normal face-to-face lessons. If you need to explain something to the parents (eg because you forgot to do it when you emailed them the plan for the week), try to get the children to explain it to them instead: they could use classroom language, such as *It's like an insect* or *It means ... in Spanish*. This will also avoid the risk of you undermining the normal classroom dynamics or using the children's L1 disproportionately.

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7 Do get the parents involved.

The fact that the children are your main audience doesn't mean you should forget about their parents. Do get the parents to join in with your activities. Some simple activities where the parents can participate include:

- *Sing after me:* Choose a short song your students know well or have just learnt. The child sings it first and then it's the parents' turn.
- *Find an object:* The child goes and finds a toy, a crayon, a lego brick (things that are easy and safe to find and handle) and the parent goes and finds a cup, a book or blanket. Once they get back in front of the screen, they have to decide what to do with both (eg p*ut the toy in the cup, colour in the book with the crayon, hide the lego brick under the blanket*, etc).
- *Be a (cow).* The child and parent take turns to mime an animal and say the word in English. Older students could also say where each animal lives, if it jumps or flies, or even what food it eats, for example.

8 Don't forget that some children might be on their own!

One thing to bear in mind is that some of your students might not have a parent partnering with them one day, or that a parent might well be around but busy on their own computer. So always have something up your sleeve for those days: if you have planned an activity like 'Find an object', you could email the parents the day before class with a list of objects to use for the activity and ask them to put these somewhere easy (and safe) so that their child will be able to find them safely without their help. For the 'Sing after me' activity, you could ask the child to sing the song twice and imitate one of their parents' voices the second time they sing it. Don't forget to reward them for doing such a wonderful job without their parents' help!

9 Set homework.

Homework for preschoolers is done when both children and parents are in the same place at the same time and join forces to do or make something together. Here are some basic activities they might enjoy doing together for homework:

- *Draw, colour in and cut out:* The children and parents draw, colour in and cut out five little speckled frogs and a speckled log. They attach the frogs to the log with Blu Tack and then practise singing the 'frog song' together for a special singalong in the next class:
  Five little speckled frogs
  Sat on a speckled log
  Eating the most delicious grubs (yum yum)
  One jumped into the pool
  Where it was nice and cool
  Then there were four green speckled frogs. (glup glup) etc.
- *Your favourite book/toy:* With the help of their parents, the children rehearse reading their favourite book or prepare for a show-and-tell about their favourite toy. For your students (and parents) to get the most out of this experience, you could show them how to do it yourself first – even better if you have little children of your own! Email them tips on how to plan their storytelling or show-and-tell session: using different voices for different characters, using gestures and facial expressions, wielding props (swords, paper clouds, hats, etc), and so on. It's important to give them plenty of time to prepare – some parents (not their children, of course) just can't manage the stress of performance! So make room for one storytelling/show-and-tell session every two or three days or more.
- *Show me what you can do:* Ask the children to think about something they know how to do really well. Give them ideas: jumping, walking, throwing or catching a tennis ball, etc. The parents can help their children prepare for a brief demonstration of their wonderful skill, in which the child will say what they are great at and explain as they do so (even if the language they use is as simple as *This is how you do it, You move your hands/legs/feet like this* or *I can jump once/twice/three times in a row*). They can then demonstrate the next day during class or, if they prefer, the parents can record a video of their child doing the demonstration and then share it with you for appraisal. Children love showing off and can often do amazing things.

10 Keep negative thoughts at bay.

If the parents want to share their negative thoughts about the difficulties of the current situation (this has happened to me a couple of times), do your best to keep it short. Even parents can sometimes forget that their children don't appreciate hearing certain things and may be worried by what they say. This might also lead the children to have a change of heart and want to do something else instead of attending their English class. Politely remind everyone to look on the bright side. You could point out to the parents that they are doing incredible things with their children like never before, or that they finally have the opportunity to brush up their basic English (perhaps one of their recurrent new year's resolutions).

♦ ♦ ♦

Staying at home doesn't mean that we can't be the usual thrilling, sparkling teachers we are in class. I recently read a social media post from a teacher I know. She wrote that the current crisis had left her students 'in the middle of nowhere'. This made me think. It's true that we and our students may be feeling lost. But we are where we are and we have what we have. We're always in the middle of 'somewhere'! So let's just start from there. Let's brace ourselves and get better at this! ■

Riccardo Chiappini is a Delta-qualified EFL teacher, teacher trainer and materials writer based in Madrid. He has developed materials for online teacher training and language courses for Oxford University Press and the Spanish Ministry of Education. Most recently, he has been doing research on distance learning for very young learners and how to help primary and secondary students develop critical thinking and leadership strategies in the English language classroom.

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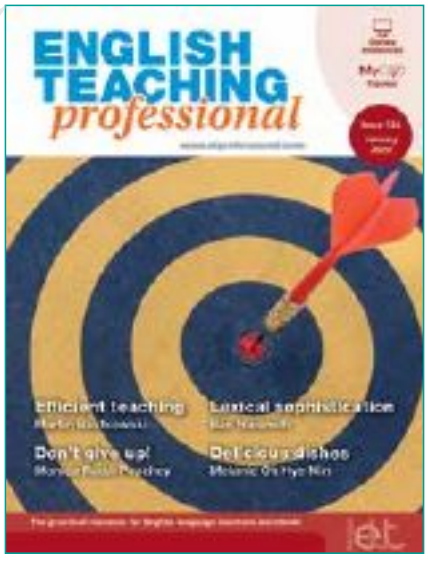

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I've heard of a new teaching technique or method I'd like to try, but I'm not sure where to begin… I don't have much time to search the internet so I really need easy-to-digest information with suggestions of classroom application in one place.

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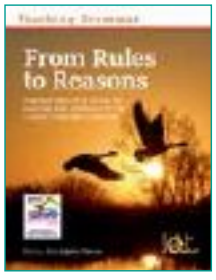

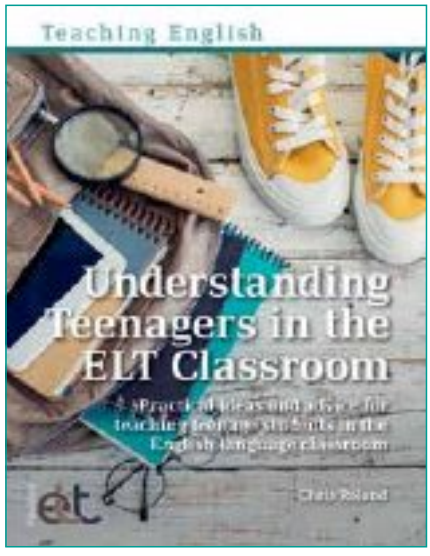

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Students' stories 19

David Heathfield tells a tale of an impossible choice.

'Wise Ma Sabe' is a Burmese folktale about an extraordinarily quick-thinking and resourceful young woman. It was told beautifully by Subhaporn Paenoi from Thailand in a general English class I was teaching in the UK before the Coronavirus lockdown. She seemed to live the story as she told it to her classmates, identifying closely with the clever young heroine. In this issue, we concentrate on the online potential of the story.

'Wise Ma Sabe'

Storytelling tip: Storytelling and online chat boxes

Like many teachers in the current crisis, I have had to learn to teach in a very different way. It can be a challenge to maintain a close relationship with our students when teaching online, but one of the most powerful ways to engage them emotionally is through storytelling. This is easier to do in regular classroom teaching, but it is also possible to reach our students meaningfully by sharing stories online. As a member of the Hands Up Project team of storytelling teachers, I have used *Facebook Live* and *Zoom* to tell 'Wise Ma Sabe' to an audience of teenage students from around the globe. This story is about a young woman who finds her way out of a seemingly impossible situation, and it can give a powerful message to our students in the midst of the current uncertainties.

Teachers can still engage with their students creatively and emotionally through inventive use of online chat facilities. Posting comments in a chat box is perfect for practising informal writing – and equally good for simulating and developing spoken English. This is because the students can take a little more time to formulate and self-edit their utterances before posting them.

Before telling

Ask the students if they have ever been in a situation where they felt they had no control over what was happening to them. Invite them to share their feelings in the chat if they wish. Let them know that the Burmese folktale you are going to tell them involves a young woman called Ma Sabe (/mæ sæbeɪ/) who finds herself stuck in this kind of situation.

Introduce the cast of characters in the story by holding a sheet of paper up to your camera and revealing and explaining the characters one by one:

- Ma Sabe
- Her mother
- The blacksmith she wants to marry
- The cruel king
- The king's soldiers

Also show them two small stones, one black and one white, and a beautiful bag.

Invite the students to quiz you for three minutes about the plot of the story. This can be done orally but, where technical issues make oral communication challenging, I find it works well if the students ask questions using the chat. Read out each question as it appears, reformulating it into natural spoken English where necessary, and give a simple, brief, spoken answer – but don't give away the plot of the story.

Give the students another three minutes to predict and write in the chat the story outline they imagine, based on your answers. As they post their outlines, encourage them to read other outlines and respond with emojis or short comments to ones they particularly like or find surprising.

Invite them to listen to you telling the story, but warn them that you are going to stop at the climax and that they will create their own endings.

While telling

Use the camera on your device to communicate directly with your audience. The space will be very different from the physical classroom, but you can play with it just as effectively.

- If I'm using my laptop, I generally place it on a shelf at shoulder height and stand up. This is allows me freedom to play with space and proximity in a way which is less easy in a classroom. For example, I can move in very close and look into the camera to show Ma Sabe's vulnerability and inner thoughts when she is faced with the impossible choice, and then move away from the laptop to be physically expressive when Ma Sabe dances with the stone in her hand and throws it into the river.
- Using my mobile gives a sense of intimacy and the chance to take the students with me into different physical spaces with different backgrounds. However, holding my mobile limits my ability to move physically in front of the camera, unless I sometimes balance it on a surface.

Tell the story and stop at the moment when Ma Sabe has to make her decision. Invite the students to imagine what will happen. When I told the story to a small class of teenagers on *Zoom*, they went into breakout rooms in pairs to create their endings orally. When I told it on *Facebook Live* to a large global audience, I invited the students to write their ideas in the chat box, where possible talking about their ideas with another person in their home before writing.

Reading out and valuing a student's written ending which everyone can see in the chat is an act of trust and intimacy and can be validating and encouraging for the student. If the sound quality is clear enough, the students in a *Zoom* class can tell their endings orally, but there is often a risk of audio distortion or the internet connection being interrupted, so it can be advantageous if they write their ideas in the chat first. I often ask the students to record me telling their endings, so that they can later review

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the language used as I reformulate their words into more natural English while doing my best not to rob them of their own storytelling voice.

After telling

Allow the students a couple of minutes to respond to the story spontaneously in the chat.

Creative response activities, such as composing and performing a song or poem or making and displaying artwork, take time and these can be done after class, and recordings or photos can be displayed in a shared virtual space. Quicker activities can easily be done immediately, such as showing a short list of personal response questions from which the students can choose a few, writing their answers in the chat, or inviting them to choose a gift for one of the characters at the end of the story. One student gave Ma Sabe the power to free the king's 300 wives and, through her wisdom, bring about gender equality.

You can learn this story by reading it below (you can also download it from the *ETp* website at **www.etprofessional.com/media/35519/etp129onlineresources_heathfield.pdf**), or by listening to me telling it to international students on the Hands Up Project at *www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1520512144783070&ref=watch_permalink*.

You can view the same recording (without the interactive chat) at *https://youtu.be/Joy4nXjmRgA*. ■

David Heathfield is a freelance storyteller, teacher and teacher trainer. He is the author of *Storytelling With Our Students: Techniques for Telling Tales from Around the World* and *Spontaneous Speaking: Drama Activities for Confidence and Fluency*, both published by DELTA Publishing. He is a member of The Creativity Group.
www.davidheathfield.co.uk

Wise Ma Sabe

There was once a wise girl whose name was Ma Sabe. She lived with her mother in a simple home by a river with a little land which they farmed. They had to pay a high rent to the king, who was a powerful, cruel and selfish man and owned all the land. All the farmers owed him a lot of money. The king had 300 wives and was always looking for a new one. Ma Sabe loved a blacksmith and wished to marry no one but him.

One day, the king was riding out on his white elephant when he saw Ma Sabe near the river. 'She will be my new wife.'

The king rode on to the small house by the river and found Ma Sabe's mother.

'I will marry your daughter.'

'No, that cannot be,' said Ma Sabe's mother. She knew about the king's cruelty and greed.

'You are saying no to me? I am the king and you owe me rent. You cannot refuse.'

The king was furious as he rode away.

The next day, the king returned on his white elephant, which was now decorated with bright colours. The king was wearing a crown set with rubies and was followed by a band of soldiers in shining armour. There, outside the house beside the river, Ma Sabe stood with her mother and her beloved blacksmith.

'Ma Sabe,' said the king, 'I wish you to be my new wife, but your mother has other ideas, so I am giving you a chance. Here, I have a game for you to play. In this beautiful embroidered bag there are two small stones, one white and one black. Put your hand in the bag and take a stone. If you choose the white stone, your mother's debt is cancelled and you will not have to marry me. However, if the stone you pick is black, then the debt is still cancelled, but you will be my wife. What do you say?'

'No!' cried Ma Sabe's mother.

Ma Sabe paused to think. She guessed that the cruel king had put two black stones in the bag. If she refused to play, she knew the king would be angry, and would cause her mother problems. But if she took out a black stone, she would have to marry the unkind and selfish king. She looked at the blacksmith, the man she loved, and thought about what to do. Then she looked the king in the eye.

What do you think Ma Sabe did? What would you do?

'I will do it. I will play the game.'

She walked towards the king and reached into the bag. She took out one stone, gripped tightly in her hand. She held her hand close to her face and opened her fingers just enough so that only she could see. She shouted out with joy and then she laughed.

'I am safe, I do not have to marry the king. My mother has no more debts. I am free to marry the man I want!'

She ran and jumped and span around and threw the stone into the river.

The king shouted in confusion.

'What have you done?'

'Oh, dear king. I was so pleased at not having to marry you that I accidentally dropped the stone into the river.'

'But you took the black stone!'

'My dear king, if you look in the bag you will see that the stone that is still in there is black. So you know the colour of the stone I dropped in the river was white.'

The king was confused and angry but could say nothing in front of his soldiers. He climbed back onto his elephant and rode away.

With her mother's blessing, wise Ma Sabe was soon married to the blacksmith, and they lived a long and happy life.

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IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

More tested lessons, suggestions, tips and techniques which have all worked for *ETp* readers. Try them out for yourself – and then send us your own contribution. All the contributors to this issue will receive a digital subscription to *Modern English Teacher.*

STUDENT-AUTHORED TESTS

Stephanie Hirschman, Lewes, UK

In common with most teachers, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that I have been doing lots of training and scrambling to move my teaching online. The take-home message for me has been that good teaching online is actually just good teaching, harnessing the technology to make sure that interactivity is preserved as much as possible.

I tried the activity described here with my class before the lockdown, and was pleased with the results. Happily, it will also work really well online, where it will inject some lively pair- or groupwork into what might otherwise be a very dry testing interlude.

Here's the context: my class were advanced and highly motivated. We were using a coursebook with a very heavy focus on lexis, including lots of lexical chunks. I was underwhelmed by the progress tests which came with the coursebook – they were too easy, too dull and lacking in the richness needed to contextualise natural expressions. Yet the students wanted to be tested to measure their progress, and my institution requires regular testing. I could have written my own test, but then it occurred to me that this was something the students could do for each other; they would write a better test than I would, because they would know what had been tricky for them to master, and they would be learning twice – once when they wrote the questions, and again when they answered them.

I started with a model – five different exercise types using the target language (related to describing people and first impressions): error correction, multiple choice, gap-fill, put the letters in order (anagram) to make a word within a sentence, and put the words in order (to make a sentence). The students first completed examples of these exercises and identified the exercise types. Then, working in pairs, they followed these instructions:

Now write more exercises to test your classmates:

- Using the topic of famous people, write one of each exercise type – as a minimum.
- Test the language from pages 16 and 17 of the coursebook.
- Provide a challenge for your classmates (don't make the questions too easy).
- Create a separate answer key with the correct answers and say which famous person the sentence is about.
- We will then try all the exercises.

As I was monitoring and supporting, I observed that some of the students recognised that the different question types can relate to specific areas of mastery. For example, gap-fills test form and meaning; multiple-choice questions work well for collocations; anagrams support spelling; and word re-ordering tests the syntax of multi-word expressions. Obviously, error correction tests common mistakes. If any students hadn't made these connections, I was able to nudge them in the right direction.

In the physical classroom, I quickly proofread the exercises, and then we put them up on the walls. The students walked around doing the different exercises – we had six groups, so each student did at least 30 exercises. They could collaborate if they wanted to, and then check their answers after each mini-test. Online, the students could work collaboratively in a breakout room (or similar) to write their tests and then submit them to the teacher for checking. The tests could then be posted on *Padlet*, or on a shared *Word* document, or even rewritten by the teacher in a VLE quiz function and made available to all the students to try out. User comments could be added, eg *This was a tough question!* or *I think there might be another correct answer.*

Student feedback was positive, and some interesting variations were suggested. Some students thought it would be helpful if specific lexical items had been assigned to each pair, as, inevitably, some items were repeated across the tests. Others thought this repetition was helpful – presumably, the students chose the most difficult items to test each other on. I made a note to myself that we could also include a pronunciation exercise, eg number of syllables and stress – I used this as an extension activity for early finishers. I also wondered if grouping students with the same L1, to write questions for other students with the same L1, might be interesting, but obviously this wouldn't always be possible. The students said they enjoyed the testing phase more than creating the tests – they wanted to be able to see their mistakes. In any event, the students wanted to try this again and, with more experience under their belts, I think they will do an even better job next time.

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BOARD GAMES

Shiromi Upulaneththa, Kandy, Sri Lanka

The language learning classroom should be full of fun, irrespective of age or gender. The activity described here is one that I used at the end of a session with my pre-service trainee teachers.

First, I put the trainees into six groups with four members in each. I gave each group a simple board game – the sort where you throw dice and move counters around a board according to the number thrown – and let them play for about 15 minutes.

Afterwards, I asked each group to select a particular area of grammar (eg past tenses, passive voice, reported speech, etc), and I told them that we were going to create some board games for secondary school classes. I also asked each group to select a particular level of proficiency.

Next, I asked them to write some questions related to their chosen grammar area and suitable for the level they had selected. They then had to draw a board game grid and put their questions into the squares. They found the activity interesting, and many of them indicated that they would try their game out with the students in their next teaching practice session. They suggested that the board game would be useful as a reflection tool, or as a way of assessing the students at the end of a lesson.

The following week, I asked the trainees to bring their notebooks for all the different subjects that they study in the training college. Again, putting them into groups, I asked each group to select one particular subject that they would like to work with, eg educational psychology, the principles of education, educational sociology, literature, etc. Then, I asked them to create board games for selected areas of those subjects. Later, we were able to hand the games over to the appropriate class tutors. The tutors found these very useful: if they were absent for any reason, the trainees could use the time profitably by playing the games.

PECHA KUCHA

Shiromi Upulaneththa, Kandy, Sri Lanka

This is another activity I have used with my trainee teachers in a linguistics class. However, I believe it could be adapted to make it suitable for use with language learners.

Pecha kucha is a Japanese expression used to describe a type of presentation limited to six minutes and 40 seconds, in which the presenter has only 20 slides, which are set to change automatically on *PowerPoint* or some other video presentation software.

Before the lesson, I asked the trainees to bring in a few items of stationery – some light-coloured pieces of A4 paper, pens, etc. Then, in class, I wrote *pecha kucha* on the board and asked them if the term was familiar to them. It wasn't, so I asked them to get out their smartphones and search for the term online. They found many websites and *YouTube* clips which explained and demonstrated the concept. Then I asked them to form groups of five and to make notes on the key features of this mode of presentation.

I then told them that we were going to have our own *pecha kucha*, but with some differences: ours would be a shorter version, with only ten slides and limited to three minutes. In addition, all our 'slides' would be made manually with coloured A4 paper, rather then being *PowerPoint* slides. I explained the rules:

- They could only use ten slides.
- Each group would get only three minutes to make their presentation.
- Every member of the group must talk at some point during the presentation.

I asked each group to choose a particular word class (eg nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, etc) on which to base their presentation. Then, I gave them only ten minutes of preparation time, asking them to refer to their notes as well as any websites to help them with the content. I kept the preparation time short, to match the presentation mode. The students all succeeded in gathering the necessary information and preparing the slides within the given time.

When they had finished the preparation, I asked them to make their presentations to the class. Even though it was challenging for them, once they got into the work, they really enjoyed it.

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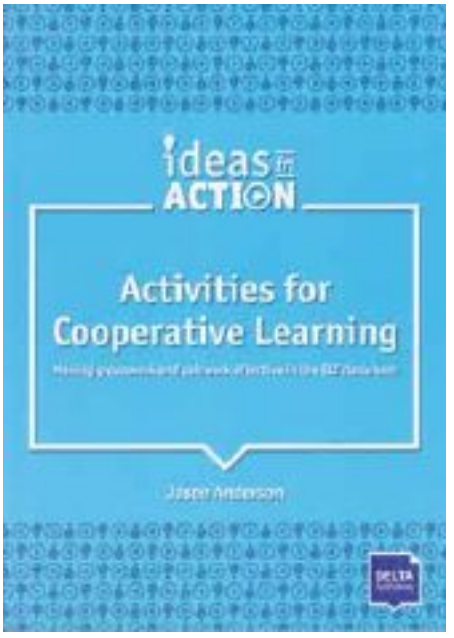
Reviews

Activities for Cooperative Learning

by Jason Anderson
Delta Publishing 2019
978-3-12-501734-4



As the title suggests, this book is based on the principles of cooperative learning, a concept that is explained thoroughly in the introduction. A distinction is made between *collaborative* learning (the use of pairwork, groupwork and any activity in which the students work together – with the possibility that stronger or more dominant students may do most of the work) and *cooperative* learning, which embodies two key principles: *positive independence* (group members work together towards a shared goal, not in competition, and must sink or swim together) and *individual accountability* (group success depends on contributions from all the students, who are each accountable, not only for their own learning, but also for that of their fellow group members). The author makes it clear that the *design* of an activity is crucial to promoting a combination of positive independence and individual accountability, and he has made sure that he practises what he preaches in the design and construction of the activities in this book.

Although it is tempting just to plunge in and try out the activities with your students, I would recommend reading the introduction carefully first, as it gives much information about the reasoning behind cooperative learning and many ideas for how to make it work successfully in your classroom. It is also worth taking a look at the cooperative learning assessment form at the end of the introduction. Using this with your students will make it clear to them precisely what it is that you expect from them when they are working on a cooperative learning activity (eg being polite and friendly to their classmates, listening to their classmates' ideas and letting them finish before speaking, helping classmates who have difficulties, listening carefully to feedback). Some of these are things that the students may not have thought about before. Having to give themselves a score from 1–5 on the various points and comparing this with the score that their teacher gives them may be a salutary exercise!

The rest of the book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 concentrates on strategies and tools rather than specific activities, but the seven chapters that follow are full of activity suggestions, with photocopiable elements. The chapters are organised according to type (eg Chapter 2 has pairwork activities, Chapter 3 has activities where the students start in pairs and then form groups, Chapter 4 has teamwork activities). Each activity within a chapter is preceded by a summary (with a chart of the main skills and functions involved), a list of key advantages and a section of important notes and variations. These ensure that the teacher is fully prepared before embarking on any activity. The activities themselves have clear step-by-step preparation and procedural notes, plus ideas for extension tasks. The level of each task, together with the age of the students for which it is suitable (mainly teens to adults, and quite precisely specified), the amount of time it will take and the grammar and lexis that it practises, are given in a shaded bar at the start of the preparation notes.

I particularly like the activities in Chapter 8 (Flipped cooperative learning) where the students do research activities at home before coming together in pairs or groups for more interactive tasks. It seems to me that some of these would be ideal for online teaching during the Covid-19 lockdown. The teacher could assign the research elements to be done outside class time and then bring the pairs or groups of students together in breakout rooms during an online lesson to pool their information and complete the task. Other activities throughout the book could also be made to work well in online classes.

All in all, I think this is an excellent resource book which many teachers will want to use. The activities are not only interesting, but also very well presented, with good explanations and clear stages set out to follow.

Vanessa Willis
Exeter, UK

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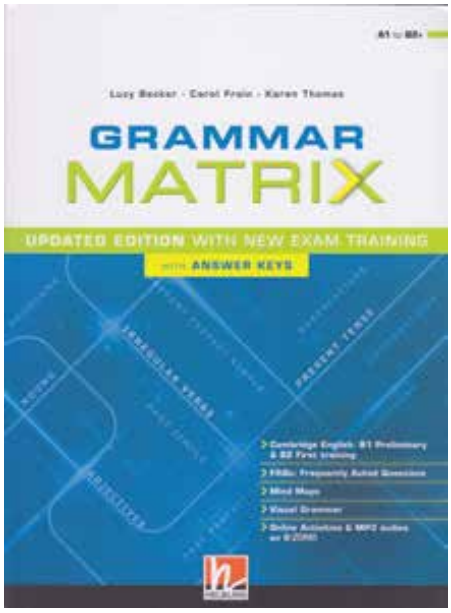
Grammar Matrix

by Lucy Becker, Carol Frain and Karen Thomas
Helbling 2019
978-3-99089-006-6



This book sets itself quite a challenge: to present, within its 484 pages, a grammar reference that is suitable for students from level A1 to B2+ of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is quite a spread of proficiency. The book is divided into two main sections. The 'Basics' section (Units 1 to 6) covers relatively simple structures, such as nouns and articles, personal pronouns, the verb *be*, adjectives, the present simple, *-ing* forms and the present continuous. The 'Main' section (Units 7 to 21) goes into more intricate matters, such as modal verbs, relative clauses, word order, passive forms and conditionals. In each unit, there are four lessons, each with an explanation of a grammar point, followed by practice exercises. At the end of each unit, there is a 'Roundup' section with revision exercises and a 'Reflecting on grammar' section to test the students' knowledge of the grammar they have just studied.

The edition reviewed here has an answer key, and the 'Letter to students' at the beginning says the book is, therefore, 'perfect' for self-study. However, I feel that many students, certainly those at A1 level, may still need a teacher to interpret some of the explanations and to adjudicate over some of the answers.

As with many grammar exercise books with a tendency to be all things to all people, space is tight and there are quite a few exercises (often gap-fills) in which the sentences are discrete and without context. As a result, some of the answers are debatable, and students who produce answers that are just as valid as those given in the key may be justifiably aggrieved if those answers are marked as incorrect. An example comes in Unit 12, where the students are invited to complete gaps in sentences with *wherever*, *whoever*, *whatever* or *whenever*. Although the number of times each word is required within the exercise is given, so eventually the expected answers can be discerned, there is not enough context in a sentence like *I will find them, ... they are* to determine which is the correct answer. The required, and perhaps most likely, answer is *wherever*, but – depending on the context and the meaning of 'them' – other answers are possible: *I will find them, whoever they are* (the children who broke my window); *I will find them, whatever they are* (the pests that have been eating my cabbage plants). More inventive minds than mine might even find a context for *I will find them, whenever they are*. Making an exercise 'watertight' by specifying the number of times a word should be used is always a bit of a cheat; it is better to spend the time making sure the context demands one answer and one answer alone.

This is not to say that all the exercises are without context, and it is great to see that space has been found for an admirable number of continuous texts and dialogues. Some of the more difficult exercises (a coding system is used, with a single dot representing the easiest exercises and four dots the most difficult) are in the style of those that appear in the Cambridge exams. This is a good idea, because it means that particular grammar points that may well be tested in such exams appear all together in one exercise. As a result, the contrast between the use of, say, *although*, *but*, *though*, *however* and *even though* can be seen and practised in one place. I would hope, however, that no Cambridge exam item writer would ask the students to use *however* in the middle of a sentence as a conjunction, as in the given answer to one question in this section (*I don't know his wife, however I know his children*), which I would consider just plain wrong!

The grammar explanations that precede the exercises are, on the whole, admirably clear. In addition, there are FAQ boxes throughout in which common student questions about grammar are answered briefly but clearly. For example: *What is the difference between 'a pair of' and 'a couple of'? I've heard people say 'In my bedroom, there's a wardrobe, a desk and two chairs'. Why is it 'there's' and not 'there are', given that it's about several things? What's the difference between 'I wish I had a car' and 'I'd like to have a car'?* These add greatly to the helpfulness of the book, because they are things that students do often ask, and which some teachers may struggle to explain.

Another useful feature is a 'Visual grammar' section in the appendices at the end of the book, in which diagrams, charts and mindmaps are used to present some of the grammar structures in the book in a different way. The students have to complete these, as well as simply look at them. Representation of grammar structures in some sort of pictorial way is becoming popular with teachers, so this section has considerable appeal. A mindmap section at the beginning of the book provides an excellent visual reference of the main grammatical terms (*noun, verb, adjective, pronoun*, etc) with examples of their subgroups (eg *uncountable nouns, auxiliary verbs, possessive adjectives, relative pronouns*, etc).

There are also pages in the appendices with the main grammatical differences between British and American English, the international phonemic alphabet, an explanation of punctuation marks, verb tables and irregular verb lists. In such a complicated and all-embracing book, it is good to see that there is also an index.

In keeping with the book's aim to cater for everybody, further practice exercises are available online, and these include simplified activities for learners with special educational needs.

Danielle Weston
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SCRAPBOOK

Gems, titbits, puzzles, foibles, quirks, bits & pieces, quotations, snippets, odds & ends, what you will

It was widely predicted that the computer age would herald a life of leisure, with the drudgery of *actual work* being done (and perhaps being done better) by machines. However, as many of us are – thanks to Covid-19 – currently experiencing some of the leisure time that computers have consistently failed to deliver, our thoughts may turn to hobbies.

It is interesting to read a number of opinions on what actually constitutes a hobby:

'When a habit begins to cost money, it's called a hobby.' (Jewish proverb) The oft-quoted example of this is boating of any kind, but especially motor-powered – it is like standing under a shower while tearing up £50 notes …

'Find three hobbies you love: One to make you money, one to keep you in shape and one to be creative.' (Author unknown)

'Happy is the man who is living by his hobby.' (George Bernard Shaw, British playwright)

'Hobbies are for people who don't read books.' (Lissa Evans, British novelist)

Bookworms

The final quotation above reminds us that reading is firmly on the list of the most popular hobbies, along with sports and fishing (more people go fishing in the UK than attend football matches). For many people, the greatest relaxation-time pleasure is to be found in a book, and it seems that reading has topped the popularity list throughout the ages:

'If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.' (Cicero, Roman philosopher)

'My personal hobbies are reading, listening to music, and silence.' Edith Sitwell, British poet)

'Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.' (attributed to Groucho Marx, American comedian)

More exciting ways to pass the time

Reading may be fine for those who yearn for a quiet life, but it is always interesting to see what constitutes a more exotic pastime:

Extreme ironing
Yes, it's a competitive sport, also known as 'EI'. Extreme ironing consists of ironing clothing in different, usually extreme, situations, such as whilst rock climbing, surfing, on a kayak …

Stone skipping
Skipping stones is exactly that. You take a flat, oval-shaped stone and a nice calm lake or river, and you try to make the stone bounce across the water as many times as possible. The current record holder managed a 51-bounce throw.

Competitive duck herding
You learn to herd ducks like you would sheep. Apparently, it has become a popular activity for corporate team-building days out. I am assuming that the title doesn't refer to ambitious ducks …

Element collecting
This hobby consists of collecting elements from the Periodic Table. People do this in different ways, and with the elements in different purities. It is not recommended that you collect heavy, poisonous and radioactive elements (security at nuclear sites is usually fairly high!)

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Less exciting ways to pass the time

At the other end of the scale, there are some hobbies which might conceivably be thought less than fascinating:

Train station spotting
Spotting trains, ie recording the engine numbers, is bad enough, but *stations*?

Keeping a lawn mowing diary
Seventy-seven-year-old David Grisenthwaite kept a 20-year record of exactly when he mowed his lawn; he also kept notes of how much garden waste he produced.

Collecting traffic cones
This might get more exciting if the police catch you at it.

Becoming a roundabout enthusiast
This is possibly more exciting than train station spotting (see above) if you have to cross busy roads and actually stand on each roundabout in order for it to count.

Collecting bricks
An easy hobby for a builder or a demolition expert, I suppose.

What your hobby says about you

My personal award for the most boring activity, frequently listed under 'Hobbies' in a CV, has to be *shopping*!

Talking of CVs, it has long been part of the character-assessment process to ask a job applicant to list their hobbies. It doesn't seem to have occurred to some job seekers that their answers might need rather more careful consideration than they have given them. Here are some examples of what prospective job applicants have put as their hobbies. Would you offer any of them an actual job?

- Honestly, I like doing nothing.
- Painting my toenails.
- Talking.
- Learning languages – I'm currently teaching myself to speak Wookie. (a Wookie is a hairy alien from the *Star Wars* films)
- Travel.
- Skin collecting.
- Arguing with people online.
- Streaking.
- Racing.
- Handcuff-collecting.
- Sleeping.
- Cooking dogs. (a typing error, one hopes)
- Owls.
- Playing dead.
- You don't want to know …

Of course, unless the interviewer was a fan of *The Lord of the Rings*, this applicant is unlikely to have got the job:

Interviewer *To conclude your job interview, what are your favorite hobbies?*

Applicant *Bilbo, Frodo and Sam.*

More bizarre ways of passing the time

In Wisconsin, USA, a competition takes place in which the entrants must do their best impression of a cow. The latest winner was a ten-year-old boy named Austin, who received $1,000, a cow-print jacket, and a golden cow bell, among other prizes.

Australian Graham Barker has been collecting and storing his navel fluff since 1984. With his hefty collection now weighing in at 22.1 grams, this is arguably the most bizarre hobby of them all.

Believe it or not, websites are available for 'baggists' to buy and trade aeroplane sick bags. One of the original baggists, from Singapore, has an impressive collection of 388 bags from 186 airlines.

Giant baseball painting began in 1977, when Mike Carmichael from Indiana, USA, decided to paint and repaint a baseball, leading to the creation of a 3,500-pound paint-covered ball, six feet in diameter and with over 22,894 coats of paint on it. This has become a local tourist attraction, and visitors are invited to join in by adding yet another coat to the ball. Carmichael's only rule is that each coat must be a different colour from the previous one.

Hobby jokes

One of my hobbies is time travel; I do it from time to time.

I'm going to combine my hobbies of taxidermy and bomb making – and make you an otter you can't defuse.

My wife says I have too many hobbies. I've already given up tennis and swimming, but painting is where I draw the line.

I was talking to my friend over the weekend, when the subject of hobbies came up. 'What do you do in your free time?' I asked.
'I stalk people,' he responded.
'Oh,' I exclaimed. 'Really? I enjoy walks in the park or going to the cinema with friends.'
'I know.'

My three favourite hobbies are eating my family and not using commas.

Why do herb pickers have so many hobbies?
They've got a lot of thyme on their hands.

What did you do during Covid-19?

On the following page is an activity to use with your students. It is based on conversations about leisure activities done during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Scrapbook compiled by Ian Waring Green

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What did you do during Covid-19?

Copy and cut out the conversation cards and give one to each pair of students (the cards can also be downloaded from the *ETp* website at **www.etprofessional.com/media/35520/etp-129-onlineresources_scrapbook_green.pdf**). Each conversation is about an activity that one of the speakers did during the Covid-19 lockdown. Ask each pair to decide what this activity was (they can check with you). They should then perform their conversation to the class and get the other students to listen and guess what it was.

Afterwards, have a discussion about what leisure activities the students themselves did during the lockdown. Each pair might like to make their own 'mystery activity' conversation to test the rest of the class.

Suggested answers

1 wrote a novel 2 exercised on an electric bicycle 3 baked bread 4 did yoga 5 played the piano 6 watched recordings of theatre/opera/ballet productions 7 had a clearout of the house 8 grew vegetables in the garden

1

A: I'd been meaning to do it for years, but I'd just never found the time.

B: But how did you get started? Did you just sit down at your computer and begin writing?

A: Well, as I say, I had been intending to do it for some time, so I already had some ideas for the basic plot and the characters. Before I knew it, I'd completed ten chapters.

B: Wow!

2

A: So did you go out on it every day?

B: Yes, once we were told that we could exercise.

A: But wasn't it really hard work? There are lots of hills where you live.

B: Ah, but I bought myself an electric one.

A: I see. Isn't that cheating?

B: Not really. I pedalled most of the way, but just got a bit of extra help for going up the hills.

3

A: I've put on so much weight!

B: I'm not surprised. Did you make something every day?

A: Well, not every day. There were times when I couldn't get any yeast or the right type of flour. But when I could, I made several loaves at a time.

B: And ate them as well?

A: Well yes, it's so much better than the shop-bought stuff.

4

A: So had you done any before?

B: Well, I went to an evening class once, but I didn't like the teacher much, so I gave up.

A: Weren't all the classes closed, though?

B: Yes, but this was a class on *YouTube*. The teacher demonstrated all the positions really clearly. The moves were quite simple and I felt really good afterwards. Really relaxed.

A: So, can you stand on your head now?

B: No, but I can do all sorts of poses that stretch the muscles and improve the balance.

5

A: I had lessons when I was a child. But I didn't enjoy practising every day and my teacher used to get angry if I played a wrong note. So I gave up.

B: What made you take it up again now?

A: Well, I knew I would have lots of time to practise, and I wanted to do something creative during the lockdown.

A: But you must have needed something to practise on!

B: My grandfather died last year and he left me his. It was taking up a huge amount of space in my spare room. I kept a lot of books and things on top of it, so it was nice to use it properly again.

6

A: Before the lockdown, I used to go at least once a week.

B: You must have missed it. How did you manage?

A: Well, lots of places were putting recordings on the internet. I saw several shows that I'd wanted to see live but had missed.

B: Not quite the same as seeing them live, though.

A: No, but the camera work was really good and there were little details that I'd never have been able to see from my usual seat at the back of the circle!

7

A: Wow! This looks great. There's so much space!

B: I'd been meaning to do it for years, and the lockdown finally gave me the time. There were loads of things that I never use, and I just put them outside until I was left with just the things I really like and really use.

A: What did you do with all of it?

B: I took it all to a recycling centre as soon as they opened again.

8

A: And these are carrots, potatoes and sweetcorn.

B: What was here before? I think I remember you had roses ...

A: Yes, this bed was all flowers. But I thought it would be good to produce my own food.

B: So you dug everything up and replaced the flowers with vegetables?

A: Well, not everything. I still have some flowers over there outside the front door.

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Let's map it out!

Margit Szesztay and **Uwe Pohl** consider interactive work modes in the classroom.

Why an article on face-to-face interaction at a time when there is a move to online teaching, not just in ELT but in education in general? As we are writing these lines, the world is in the midst of the corona epidemic, with schools and universities in most countries having to change over to 'virtual mode'. Perhaps this global experiment with online teaching will help us to see more clearly what it is that *can* and what it is that *cannot* be done online. One positive outcome, then, might be a greater understanding and appreciation of face-to-face classroom interaction. It is our hope that the visual representation of interaction formats provided by this article will help teachers to make the most of those occasions when their students can come together in real time.

Patterns of work

Encouraging meaningful interaction between our students is a central concern for most teachers of English, and there have been a number of helpful publications on this topic. Here, we would just like to mention Jim Scrivener's comprehensive treatment of classroom management, and the *ETp* article by Mary Cerutti and her colleagues, 'Invitation to interaction', which provides a very useful categorisation of communication activities, based on their purpose and possible benefits.

Our aim with this article has not been to come up with brand new work modes. Rather, we would like to provide an overview of the *patterns of work* which we feel are particularly relevant for meaningful interaction in general language teaching and content-based language teaching, as well as in teacher training. We will also highlight some key benefits of making interactive work patterns central to thinking about how we manage our classrooms.

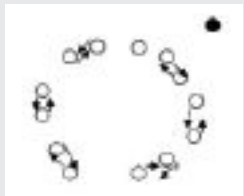
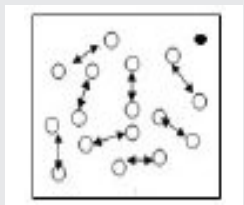
Interactive work modes

When we were entering the ELT profession some 30 years ago, it was customary to refer to *individual work*, *pairwork*, *groupwork* and *frontal work* as broad labels for how teachers and students can interact. In recent years, with the emergence of approaches such as student-centred education, active learning and learner autonomy, as well as techniques such as cooperative learning, project work and small-group work, a number of further work modes have entered classrooms in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Methodology books and manuals on teaching methods these days abound in activities which have the potential to engage the students in diverse ways. Fundamentally, this reflects the recognition that, in order to become effective communicators in English *outside* the classroom, our students need plenty of opportunities to hone their communication skills *in* the classroom.

The chart that follows provides a kind of classroom map of such interactive work modes. A diagram illustrates the interaction patterns that characterise a particular way of working, alongside a brief description of each mode and the aims that can be achieved by using it. It is important to note, though, that not all work formats suit all educational contexts. Some formats may be better suited to classrooms with more conventional settings or where the students are used to more restricted interaction patterns. Others offer greater flexibility, but also require more self-direction on the part of the students.

An overview of interactive modes

Interactive work modes

	Name	Description
	**Buzz pairs**	Short, one- to two-minute oral task that pairs of students perform simultaneously. Open-ended brainstorming tasks with no single correct answer are especially suitable. **Aims:** Wake up minds, create energy, get ideas flowing; a good way to warm up the students before a whole-class activity.
	**Mingle**	A 'market place' type of activity, during which the 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. **Aims:** Move around; gather ideas; initiate a conversation; communicate with other students that they don't usually talk to.

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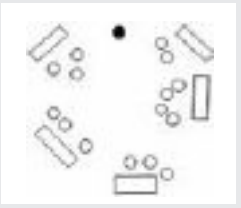
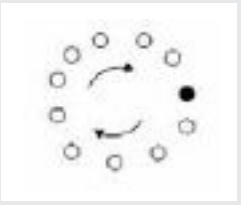
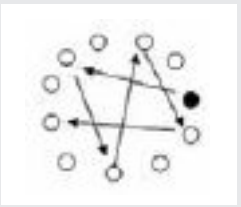
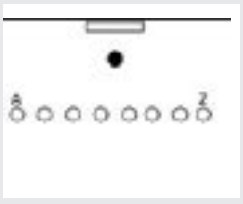
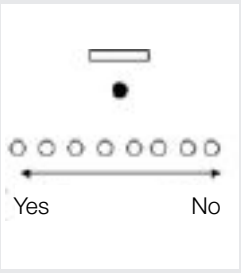
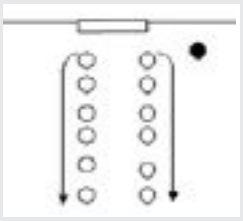
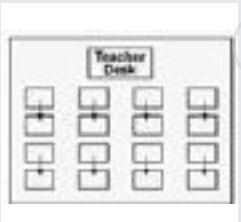
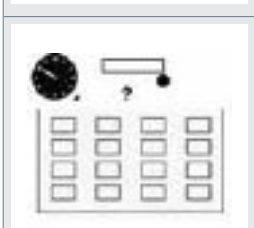
	**Gallery walk**	The teacher turns the classroom into a 'gallery' by displaying a set of pictures, quotes, puzzles, questions, etc on the walls. The students then walk around in pairs, discuss the questions, place comments on sticky notes on the pictures, etc. **Aims:** Introduce a new topic; create a relaxed atmosphere; activate the students; build learner autonomy.
	**Round**	Students respond one by one 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. **Aims:** Brainstorm ideas; give everyone a voice; get into group mode.
	**Random round**	This is similar to a Round – every student makes a short contribution – but the order in which the students speak is not based on where they are sitting. For example, the students can nominate the next speaker by throwing a ball, or the one who wants to go next can signal this by raising their hand. This makes it possible for the students to link up to each other's contributions. **Aims:** Allow attention to move around; create energy and flow in the classroom.
	**(Partial) Line-up**	The students are asked a question or given a task to think about and then find their place in a line, based on their responses. For example: *Line up based on your height*. A *Partial line-up* entails only some of the students forming a line, and the rest of the class observing, commenting and answering questions, eg *Who is the tallest in the line?* **Aims:** Create energy; move out of sitting-passively mode; appreciate the richness of backgrounds and viewpoints; form groups randomly by counting off students in the line.
	**Opinion line**	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, as well. **Aims:** Appreciate the richness of perspectives; justify your views; listen to one another; develop critical thinking.
	**Team competition**	The teacher divides the class into two teams, which then compete to do a given set of tasks. For example, the two teams line up facing the board and the two students at the front have to run to the board on a given signal and complete a task. Then they go to the end of the line and the activity continues with the students who are now at the front. **Aims:** Collaborate; build team spirit; create energy.
	**Pass-around**	The teacher forms pairs. With a traditional seating arrangement, the students in alternating rows move one down so everyone gets a new partner. Then each pair completes a mini-task in writing and, on a given signal, passes their paper down the line. After several turns, the papers go back to the pairs who wrote on them first. For example, the task could be brainstorming or story building. **Aims:** Appreciate the richness of ideas and viewpoints in the class; prepare for a class discussion.
	**Group challenge**	Many traditional classroom tasks can be transformed into a *Group challenge*. The whole class acts as a group to carry out a task in a given amount of time – to beat the clock, with individual members contributing. Open-ended, brainstorming activities are especially suitable. **Aims:** Boost whole-class energies; group building.

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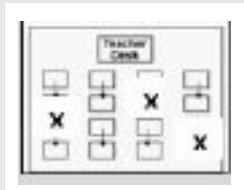
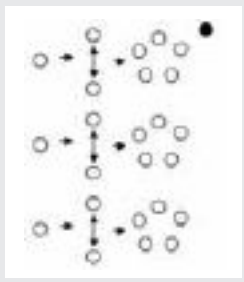
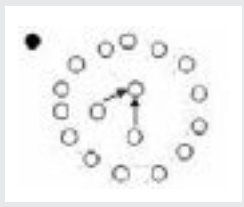
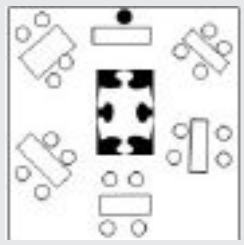
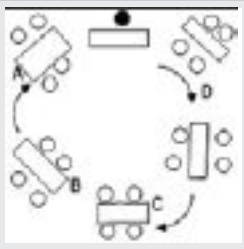
	**Partial physical response**	The students respond to prompts by standing up/sitting down/looking around, etc. The teacher might use prompts such as: *You can sit down if [you have a pet], Stand up and look around if ..., Raise your right hand if ..., Change places if ... .* **Aims:** Essentially, this is a listening comprehension exercise with the potential to energise the students. It is also a group-building activity as you compare personal information, eg about hobbies, pets, passions, birthdays.
	**Think–pair–share**	This is a three-staged activity that ensures that a diversity of views and ideas are brought into a whole-class discussion. First, the students think individually about a question; next, they discuss their ideas in pairs; and finally, there is a whole-class stage where the pairs report back in plenary mode. **Aims:** Maximise involvement during whole-class discussions; bring in diverse viewpoints.
	**Fishbowl**	The teacher divides the students into *Observers* and *Speakers*. The Speakers move into the centre of the class, ie becoming the 'fish' in the fishbowl. They engage in a discussion task while the rest of the class – sitting in the outer circle(s) – observe the interaction, take notes and later give feedback on how the discussion went. **Aims:** Practise active listening, tuning in to one another, giving feedback; raise awareness of what makes a good discussion.
	Groupwork with roles	The teacher divides the class into groups of four or five, and gives each member a different role, eg *note-taker*, *discussion leader*, *time-keeper*, *summariser*, *encourager*. Depending on the type of task, different roles might also be relevant, eg *illustrator*, *word-concept checker*. **Aims:** Maximise participation; practise groupwork skills.
	**Jigsaw groupwork**	The teacher divides the class into groups of four or five and within each group assigns the students a letter. This way, there will be students A, B, C, D (and E) in each group. Next, the students are given a short text to read related to a given topic – students with the same letter get the same text. Finally, in groups, the students summarise their text – putting together the pieces of a jigsaw. **Aims:** Maximise participation during groupwork; promote learner autonomy and learner collaboration.
	**Cross-over groups**	Groups rotate among different workstations. The 'stations' can contain different tasks to carry out, posters to comment on, etc. It is similar to a *Gallery walk* in which the groups move from station to station jointly at a given signal. **Aims:** Learner autonomy and learner collaboration; can give space for diverse tasks.

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Benefits of mapping out interactive work modes

Visualising lesson planning

In our work as teacher trainers, we have found that thinking about what interactive modes to use should not be treated as an afterthought. It really pays off if our trainees make them central to *planning* individual lessons. Visualising the way they want their students to interact – with them and with each other – is a good *starting point* for considering lesson aims, language focus, variety or timing. For example, modes like *Groupwork with roles* and *Jigsaw groupwork* are effective whenever a teacher wants the students to tackle a more complex task independently. This automatically begs questions about the composition of groups (number, level, gender), the clarity of steps and instructions, time limits and tangible work outcomes for each group.

Experienced teachers will have developed lesson routines that serve them well. But the mapping of alternative, less familiar

routes for a lesson to unfold can prompt them to explore ways of student engagement that lie outside a repertoire of tried and tested patterns. A class discussion organised as a *Fishbowl* or a *Round*, for example, may surprise the students at first. But once they have tried out less familiar arrangements, students (and teachers) may appreciate the different dynamics of attention and participation these modes allow for.

Student engagement

We can observe a growing international interest in facilitating students' access to the globalised world of business, intercultural communication and academia. At the same time, a lecture or presentation in a language other than their mother tongue can be very demanding for many students, especially if the subject needs to be studied in its own right. This is especially true for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). In both approaches, teachers or lecturers put greater emphasis on increasing student engagement with subject content. In our training of EMI instructors at Chinese universities, for example, we have been using *Buzz pairs*, *Think–pair–share* and *Gallery walk* to good effect. Using these modes encourages the lecturers to think through their classes from the *students'* perspective, which helps them to see the value of lecture breaks, giving the students processing time or incorporating short review tasks. One Chinese university lecturer in EMI described how this has affected his perception of the teacher and student role metaphorically: *'In Chinese classrooms, the teacher is usually the actor and the students are the audience. You have changed that. The teacher becomes the director and the students the actors.'*

Energy management

When students learn together as a group, teachers can feel their combined energy as a force that can work for or against them. 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'*. To manage this energy, the students' diverse, sometimes conflicting, perceptions and interests need to be managed – that is, harmonised and given direction.

A teacher who is sensitive to this will know how to use different interactive modes purposefully in order to channel energies in the classroom. Think, for example, of the familiar first-class-of-the-day scenario with sleepy, unfocused students. This might call for the teacher choosing a *Partial physical response* activity, a *Team competition* or a *Group challenge*. Involving the whole class in a simple show-and-tell, some movement or solving a brain teaser will likely raise the energy level and send a signal that class has started, before perhaps moving on to a coursebook-based listening or reading task.

Students as agents

In their book *The Triple Focus*, Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge highlight the need for teachers to help develop self-awareness (*inner* focus), social intelligence (*other* focus) and an understanding of the complex, interconnected, globalised world we all inhabit (*outer* focus). We believe that the world of ELT can make a big contribution to these wider educational aims and that extending the range of classroom interaction patterns is central to achieving these aims.

Going up to someone and initiating a conversation, learning to take turns in groups, asking open-ended questions, staying focused during a discussion and finding our public voice as speakers within the classroom community are all important skills which need a great deal of practice. We have found that, as students get more comfortable with a range of work modes, their sense of agency tends to become stronger, as well. As they share their stories, ask questions, listen to different viewpoints and work together, they start to see themselves as active shapers of the classroom community.

Here is how one of our teacher trainees put it: *'In the traditional classroom, we face the blackboard and the teacher and perhaps are occasionally asked to face each other. In the communicative classroom this is turned around: we usually face each other, and are occasionally asked to turn to the teacher. In my opinion, this can plant the seeds of cooperation.'*

♦ ♦ ♦

Ultimately, it is up to the individual teacher to decide what modes to incorporate in their school context and what kind of adaptation would be needed to make the basic format work. Whichever adaptation we choose, once we start experimenting, we will notice that each work mode changes the atmosphere somewhat and enables a different interaction between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. This often encourages the formation of new habits of working together which, over time, creates a richer and more communicative culture in the classroom. ■

Bentley, T *Facilitation: Providing Opportunities for Learning* McGraw-Hill 1994

Cerutti, M, Guill, L, Pierson, C and Sharp, M 'Invitation to interaction' *English Teaching Professional* 87 2013

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Service, please! 2

Martina Dorn continues her exploration of formative assessment with practical activities.

In the first part of this article, in *ETp* Issue 128, I used the following soup-cooking analogy to explain the difference between formative and summative assessment:

Formative assessment occurs when the cook tastes the soup in the kitchen, whereas summative assessment occurs when the patron tastes the soup in the restaurant.

Here, I would like to reflect on the effectiveness of some activities that employ Assessment *for* Learning (AfL) and Assessment *as* Learning (AaL) strategies (both part of formative assessment). I have used all these activities in my own classes.

Formative assessment

The 'soup-tasting' analogy usually strikes a chord with anyone to whom it is presented. I have yet to meet anyone who would deny the multiple benefits of formative assessment, even if they might be unwilling, for whatever reason, to employ it in their own practice. One does not need to read around the topic extensively to realise that simple adjustments made to our delivery could have profound effects on and raise the standards of teaching and learning. Paul Black and Dylan William's research findings and conclusions – namely that formative assessment is likely to raise teaching and learning standards, lead to greater teacher and learner involvement, empower learners and encourage their independence and self-regulation – are hard to disagree with, although the absoluteness of their claims might be contested by some. Once practitioners are familiar with the concept of formative assessment, I find the main reason why AfL and AaL strategies are not fully exploited and embedded in teaching and learning processes is the difficulty that instructors and teachers have in translating the concept into practical ideas.

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Exploiting the strategies

It may have sounded harsh when I complained in the first part of this article that formative assessment is largely unaddressed in ELT. However, although the concept is well covered in mainstream teacher training courses (including those for would-be teachers of modern foreign languages), it is rarely addressed on ELT training courses. One might conclude from this that its principles do not apply to ELT. Furthermore, the vast majority of ELT practitioners do not encounter formative assessment, nor are they asked to employ it, unless they enter the sphere of mainstream teaching or are employed by an organisation where English is the medium of instruction.

Not all is lost, however. The British Council, as is often the case, leads the way, and there are several pages on their *Teaching English* website devoted to the concept. There are also links to web pages with practical formative assessment teaching and learning ideas for English teachers, many of which require very little preparation and resources. Additionally, some of the links on the *Teaching English* website point formative assessment enthusiasts to the *Times Educational Supplement* website, with access to numerous free resources.

Evaluating the strategies

Since returning to teaching last year, I have been in the fortunate position of being able to utilise formative assessment and evaluate its effectiveness. I am working in a higher education context, but the three pillars upon which formative assessment is based are applicable to all ELT settings:

1 Creating an environment in which the students are fully informed of the course objectives, assessment criteria/expected standards, and in which they are encouraged to believe they can improve.

2 Providing and receiving feedback in order to gauge to what degree learning has taken place, and responding to and adjusting teaching according to the received feedback.

3 Raising the students' awareness of what and how they are learning, and leading them to take control of their own learning and develop skills of self-regulation.

Example activities

The following example activities containing AfL and AaL strategies are commonly used by teachers. I employed them in my teaching practice last semester, but the list is by no means exhaustive or definitive. Naturally, adaptations may be required to some of the activities I describe, and I would urge everyone to experiment with what works for them and their groups of learners.

Course/programme student learning objectives (SLOs)

1 Jigsaw reading (AfL)

Materials: Copies of adapted text from the original SLO document

The students complete a jigsaw reading activity in groups using three or four versions of the course/programme SLO document, with blanks in different places.

2 Poster creation (AfL and AaL)

Materials: Sheets of A3 paper and marker pens

In groups, the students consider the SLOs and produce posters, depicting their perceived usefulness and importance. In addition, each group member writes their name next to the SLO or SLOs which they believe they need to concentrate on.

3 Digital distribution and 'exposure' to SLOs (AfL)

Materials: E-learning tools

The document with the SLOs is emailed to the students, or links/copies are placed on organisational e-learning platforms, such as *Moodle* or *BlackBoard*, educational or other apps, and relevant items from the SLOs are included in, for example, *PowerPoint* presentations, when teaching, so that the students are aware of the rationale of the activities.

Comments

By conducting the jigsaw reading activity with the class, my students' attention was drawn to the key points in the document containing the SLOs of the programme (provided to me by my course coordinator, with the instruction to distribute copies to the students). Such documents often end up at the bottom of the students' bags or in the bin. The jigsaw reading activity clearly served its purpose because, afterwards, some students asked me pertinent questions regarding the structure of the course and why more importance was placed on some skills rather than others.

The poster activity was well received, too. It was fascinating to see how the groups identified with the SLOs and then used creativity to portray them. The activity had a deep and personal dimension, as each student had to self-evaluate their current ability/level within the SLOs. The posters, displayed on the class noticeboard, were regularly referred to during the 16-week semester. Furthermore, I ensured that the SLOs were posted in multiple places, and either elicited them from the students or drew attention to them. As a result, each teaching and learning activity gained more significance and relevance when cross-referenced with the SLOs. It was obvious that the students had not previously experienced this approach. Nevertheless, their adjustment was surprisingly quick and, as the semester progressed, they started to comment spontaneously on the SLOs in relation to the assigned tasks, and their current and desired ability or level.

Assessment criteria/standards and proposed tasks

1 Student-friendly assessment criteria (AfL)

Materials: Digital or paper copies of the assessment criteria

In groups, the students interpret the assessment criteria for different tasks and reformulate them in terms to which they can relate.

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2 Pie chart (AaL)

Materials: A4 paper and marker pens

The students produce pie charts to illustrate what proportion of the overall course grade each task or assessment activity comprises, and compare their ideas.

3 Timeline (AaL)

Materials: A3 paper and marker pens

The students complete a timeline (for our 16-week course) with information related to the key deadlines for the completion of all the tasks.

Comments

When they were first presented with the assessment criteria/expected standards, it became apparent that my students were not accustomed to using these actively in learning. They were even puzzled, and queried why a document meant for teachers should be shared with them. First, I got them to 'decipher' the assessment criteria, and subsequently encouraged them to employ their understanding of the standards before, during and after the completion of teaching, learning and assessment tasks. That made them conscious of their current level and what knowledge/skills they lacked, which led to them considering various strategies to enhance their performance.

Through teaching the students, I realised very quickly that they were pragmatic individuals. With heavy schedules and heaps of coursework they had to complete on other courses, they needed to prioritise. The pie chart activity was appreciated greatly because the students gained a clear overview of the weightings of the different continuous assessment tasks. As a result, they were able to make conscious, and frequently calculated, decisions regarding the amount of time and effort they would devote to each task.

The timeline activity was a natural continuation of my efforts to encourage the students to organise and manage their time. I was happy that I spent time raising their awareness of some of the aspects of the programme, because it created opportunities to develop their organisational, study and decision-making skills.

Evaluation of learning

1 K–W–L (AfL)

Materials: Scrap paper and pens

At the beginning of a topic, the students create a grid with three columns: what they know; what they want to know; what they have learnt. They start by brainstorming and filling in the first two columns, and then return to the third at the end of the task/unit.

2 Pair share (AfL)

Materials: None

At the end of a lesson, the students share the following with their partner:

- Three new things they have learnt.
- What they found easy.
- What they found difficult.
- Something they would like to learn in the future.

3 I have a question (AfL)

Materials: Strips of paper, pens

The students are asked at the end of a lesson to write on strips of paper something that is still puzzling them – something specific, rather than a sweeping statement such as 'everything'. The strips of paper with the students' comments/questions are collected by the teacher.

Comments

How can we truly know the extent of our students' understanding? We will all agree that the sole application of Assessment of Learning (AoL) does not suffice: we need to dig deeper and involve the students themselves. That is why I decided to employ the K–W–L activity regularly during the 16-week course of study. It lent itself perfectly to encouraging the students to consider their existing knowledge, reflect on what new knowledge they had learnt, and also recognise what other themes could/should be explored by them in the future. Initially, the students struggled with this AfL strategy, but I persevered and utilised it frequently and consistently.

The other two AfL strategies also took a while to 'take off'. The students seemed perplexed as to why I was asking them to complete the activities at all. That was the perfect starting point for discussing the importance of any learners ascertaining their own understanding and communicating it to their teachers or instructors. I assured my students that admitting to not fully understanding something is not a weakness. I gained the students' trust and confidence and, as a result, I was able to obtain insightful information about their learning and fine-tune my subsequent lessons. I sometimes had to take hard decisions about going over certain elements of the curriculum again, rather than moving on, as dictated by the schedule. I feel now, as I did then, that the action I took was correct, because I was teaching the *students*, rather than delivering a *course* 'in a timely manner'. Many of the students remarked that they preferred this thorough coverage of the curriculum to one which is superficial and rushed.

Evaluation of teaching

1 Rate my teaching (AfL)

Materials: An online survey

The students complete a short online survey to rate the teacher's teaching on that day (using a scale from 0 to 100%). For any score lower than 70%, a reason and a suggestion for improvement must be given (you need to set this up before the survey's electronic submission is enabled).

2 Most … thing (AfL)

Materials: Strips of paper, pens

The students are asked what was the most interesting, surprising, useful, challenging, etc thing that they learnt on that day or in the current unit, and to explain why. They write their answers on strips of paper and hand them to the teacher.

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3 Stick 'em up (AfL)

Materials: Sticky notes in at least three colours, pens

The students are given coloured sticky notes, eg green, yellow and red. Thinking about the lesson, they write on them:

green – something that was effective;

yellow – something that worked partially and could be improved on (they have to say how);

red – something that did not work at all (they have to say why).

Comments

This facet of formative assessment is probably the least favourite amongst teachers. Does anyone enjoy having their lessons scrutinised? Probably not. However, it is critical if we are serious about making a difference to our students' performance, overall learning experience and the formation of their higher-order skills. I subjected myself to this scrutiny throughout the 16-week course. On one occasion, one of my lessons was rated at only 65%! How do you think I, an ELT practitioner of 20 years, felt? Mortified! Nevertheless, I appreciated the highly perceptive comments which accompanied it. The practice of regularly conducting surveys forced me to reconsider and adjust what and how I did things; and the students and I benefited positively from the modifications and tweaks.

The activities 'Most ... thing' and 'Stick 'em up' were more time-consuming, and I carried them out less often. However, these activities revealed features of my teaching practice, both effective and not so effective, to which I would probably otherwise have paid little or no attention. Consequently, I was able to exploit the findings, and displayed to the students my commitment to their success and how I adapted to improve the overall quality of my teaching.

Feedback

1 Comment-only marking (AfL and AaL)

Materials: Assessment criteria

The teacher only writes comments on the students' work, and doesn't give marks or scores. This helps the students to focus on their progress instead of rewards or punishments. The teacher uses assessment criteria and highlights the sections that refer to the students' current level of performance. The teacher arranges to speak to individual students (dialogic feedback) if they have any questions about the comments.

2 Feedback sandwich (AfL)

Materials: None

The teacher uses a 'feedback sandwich' to give comments, placing any negative feedback between two positive comments. For example:

Positive comment: *I like ... because ...*

Constructive feedback, with explanation: *This is not quite correct – check the information with ...*

Positive comment: *You have written a very clear ...*

3 My favourite 'No' (AfL)

Materials: Assessment criteria

After marking all the students' work, the teacher chooses 'the best wrong answer' (ie a thesis statement, a whole paragraph, the way an idea is developed) – something that caught their attention, or which the students got wrong frequently. The teacher presents it to the class before their work is handed back. The students have to identify why it is incorrect and make suggestions to improve it.

Comments

No teacher can ever claim that they use formative assessment if they do not provide meaningful and action-prompting feedback. I am no exception. Despite the fact that I realised that it would require a lot of time (I taught 74 students), I knew I had to approach marking in a different way. I also recognised that my students would need time and sufficient coaching before they came around to accepting any radical change. In the first few weeks of the semester, they seemed outraged when I handed back their work without any grades. With every completed task, I worked patiently with them, referred them to the SLOs and assessment criteria, cross-referencing these with my 'feedback sandwich' comments.

The students gradually got used to this innovative approach and changed their attitudes. So much so, that many of my students started to contact me via email to discuss what they could do to get better. I was often stopped in the corridor, so that the students could exchange a few words about their latest assignment. Some students would 'interrupt' my ten-minute breather between double sessions or seek me out in my office; others would arrange to see me formally during assigned office hours.

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Personal and academic goals, reflection, and peer- and self-assessment

1 Chart plotting (AaL)

Materials: An A4 booklet

The students plot two line graphs on page 1 of a booklet, based on their perceived effort and level of performance. (In my case, the x axis represented the 16-week course; the y axis was marked from 1 to 100%.) The students reflect on any increases or decreases in effort and performance, and afterwards write their thoughts in comment boxes (one for each week on the subsequent pages of the booklet). They also suggest what action they can take to improve.

2 It's good to talk (AaL)

Materials: None

The teacher suggests time slots (between double sessions, lunch time, office hours, etc) and places (classroom, communal study areas, office, etc) when the students are able to speak to them informally and briefly on a range of topics. No formal booking system is required, and the students also need to be made aware of when and where to see their teacher formally.

3 Peer check (AfL)

Materials: Assessment criteria

The students are asked to read each other's written work to look for specific points, such as spelling mistakes, past tense verbs, organisation of ideas, etc. During speaking activities, such as roleplays and presentations, they are asked to give each other feedback on specific points, eg whether they understood what was said, how interesting it was, and any questions they have.

Comments

When teachers come across the term *formative assessment*, many immediately think of peer-evaluation. Based on my observations, although there has been a strong movement in ELT to promote this teaching and learning strategy, it is still largely under-utilised and fairly unpopular. I encountered the usual challenges with peer-evaluation – my students were unfamiliar with the approach, generally reluctant to work collaboratively, and often dismissive of their peers' ability to give any worthwhile feedback. However, with my strong convictions of its usefulness, and willingness and patience to carry it out, I was suitably armed to tackle any issues. My efforts soon paid off and I was thrilled to see my students at ease when checking each other's work against the assessment criteria, and offering their counterparts suggestions for improvement.

During the course, I required the students to reflect upon and state with honesty how much effort they put into their English studies and how well they thought they performed. I reserved 15 minutes of class time for this activity at the end of each week. I was not sure what to expect, as this was the first time I had employed this type of activity, but the students saw a lot of value in it. They took it seriously and indicated truthfully how hard they worked and what their perceived level of performance was. The two line charts were very revealing. The students were often critical of themselves, especially if their work rate had lapsed or if their performance dipped. They also diligently filled out the comment boxes, and I learnt a great deal through their accounts. This resulted in my getting to know them better, both as learners and individuals. Furthermore, the students were able to recognise how important it was to set goals and continue reviewing them according to their situations. It is no exaggeration when I say that, because of this strategy, I felt in an advantageous position when it came to assisting them. The 'Chart plotting' booklets were kept in a locked cupboard in the classroom, which allowed me to remind myself of individual student's circumstances. Consequently, the feedback I gave was not generic but precisely targeted advice. Also, through this knowledge of my students, I was able to apply effective strategies to encourage them to be more proactive. They became more willing to experiment with different strategies, and search for and select alternative English language practice sources which suited them and their interests, thus becoming more independent.

Overall, I had a positive experience with formative assessment last semester. I threw myself whole-heartedly into the 'soup-cooking' process and devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to it. I used a wide range of 'tools', and added plenty of aromatic 'herbs and spices'. When the 'soup was served and tasted', my students and I were proud and satisfied, but we also realised there was no time to rest on our laurels. As we parted, we discussed what strategies they would employ as learners on their next courses, English or non-English. Likewise, I reflected on what was effective, what I would tweak or ditch, and also searched for activities containing AfL and AaL strategies to try out in the next semester. One thing I know for sure – formative assessment is to stay in my teaching practice. ■

The British Council *Teaching English*: 'Assessment for learning' *www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/assessment-learning* 2020

Times Educational Supplement 'Formative assessment' *www.tes.com/resources/search/?q=formative%20assessment* 2020

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Working with emergent language

Richard Chinn offers reflective advice to the teacher and the teacher trainer.

In the work I do, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to observe teachers in a range of contexts. I have found that, more and more, when we move beyond the technicalities of classroom management, what often becomes the focus of feedback on lessons is classroom interaction and, more specifically, the teacher's intervention in response to learner output or needs. This is a complex area, fraught with myriad choices and variables, such as:

- Should the intervention be on the spot or delayed?
- What is an appropriate reformulation, extension or upgrade?
- Is it relevant to highlight a piece of emergent language for the whole class?

and so on. Because of all these questions, working with emergent language can be seen as a complex teaching skill and, as such, needs to be addressed on practical training courses. It can also be the focus for ongoing CPD initiatives.

As Rod Ellis points out, there is a consensus that feedback on language can lead to learners developing linguistically. However, as Danny Norrington-Davies stated in his article on emergent language in *ETp* Issue 128, teachers can often be unsure about when, why and how to provide feedback to learners.

Considering this, I recently decided to examine the type of help I provide on training courses by raising the teachers' awareness of how to work more with emergent language and offering ways in which they can examine their own practice. This article will suggest different reflective instruments that readers may wish to experiment with on training programmes, INSETT sessions and on their own action research projects.

Teacher development and reflective practice

As reflective practice is widely agreed to be highly effective for teacher development (see the work of Thomas Farrell and of Steve Mann and Steve Walsh), I believe that pre-service and in-service schemes should have a focus on developing the teacher as a reflective practitioner. However, time pressures on training courses and in teachers' daily lives can often leave little room for reflection. With this in mind, I sought to help in-service teachers on a training course to work with emergent language, engage in 'exploratory practice' and become researchers of their own practice. In order to do this, they would need to gather data from their teaching to make their reflection 'evidence-based'. To facilitate this, I designed a workshop which included awareness-raising and practical examples of teaching that related to the following dimensions of teacher knowledge:

- What is emergent language? (the phenomenon and the types of language that can emerge, eg lexis, grammar, etc)
- Why include work on it? (underlying theoretical principles and examining teachers' beliefs about working with learner language)
- When should we address it? (the stages of the lesson when language can emerge and the teacher can intervene)
- How should we deal with it? (techniques)

Incorporating reflective practice into teacher development programmes

The session provided the participants with reflective instruments that they could adapt and use to monitor their own teaching on the course. However, these instruments could equally be used in other teacher development schemes, INSETT sessions and action research projects. The reflective instruments I used were using video, sensitising teachers to learner language through transcripts and recordings, and examining boardwork.

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Using video

In recent years, as shown in 2019 by Steve Mann and his colleagues, there has been increasing interest in using video in teacher development and education. Video is often used as an awareness-raising tool by getting trainees to watch more experienced teachers in action. However, this can be problematic, as many of the commercially-produced lessons available for teachers to use can either be rather dated or are created to display particular teaching techniques and procedures. As a result, it is hard to find clips of natural teaching with examples of genuine interaction and emergent language in them. So, on my courses, we used a video of an experienced teacher teaching a normal class and isolated a part of the lesson where the teacher and learners are involved in genuine interaction, for example using genuine questions in feedback to explore the learners' answers. This captured the messiness of real interaction and allowed us to explore the subtle moves the teacher made to prompt, probe, reformulate and extend learner language. Although we just noted emergent language and discussed teacher interventions, a task adapted from Danny Norrington-Davies and Nick Andon's taxonomy could be used as an awareness-raising tool. For example, the trainee teacher watches a stretch of video and fills in a table (see Figure 1). This activity serves to focus attention on classroom interaction and how the teacher on the video responds to emergent language. There is also scope to explore how the learners respond to the teacher's intervention.

Observing how experienced teachers deal with emergent language and respond to learner needs in everyday lessons can provide developing teachers with examples of what is possible in a lesson and create an opportunity for conversation about the choices we have at different intersections of a lesson. In the absence of videos, or when the sound on our recordings hasn't been perfect, I have also used short transcripts of classroom discourse to help awareness-raising on training courses. Teachers read the transcripts and complete the awareness-raising task. As well as raising awareness, this task also provides a framework for the teachers to use for examining their own classroom interaction.

Additionally, following the advice of Steve Walsh, I encourage developing teachers to examine their own teaching and bring evidence of areas they wish to investigate into the training room. To do this, they make recordings and short transcripts of their lessons to analyse. By looking at their own practice, they can notice effective techniques and gaps and identify areas that they want to work on. This means that what they learn is more likely to be 'owned' by the teacher, as it has been gained through experience. We also find the discussions about the nature of their classroom interaction very stimulating.

Through examining videos of experienced teachers teaching, the 'what', the 'why', the 'when to' and the 'how' are addressed. In addition, these dimensions of knowledge surrounding emergent language are further explored when the teachers investigate their own teaching. The role of the teacher developer, in consultation with the teachers, is to stimulate open and non-judgmental discussion about interaction and to help the teacher summarise findings and select goals for future inquiry. It also works well if developing teachers can work collaboratively to compare and discuss findings, as this can facilitate a collegial and supportive environment for development and encourage communities of practice. Those teachers who may feel apprehensive about watching themselves teach could look at how other hesitant teachers have benefited from videoing themselves. A good resource for this and using video in language teaching is the VILTE project (*https://vilte.warwick.ac.uk/items/show/13*).

Reformulating learner language

A further way in which video and transcripts can be used is to help sensitise developing teachers to learner language, which many of them suggest is difficult to hear and respond to in the moment. One way I have done this it to use a video of a learner or small group of learners doing a speaking task. The first time I play the recording is to orient the participants to the topic, the level of the learner/s and their overall intelligibility. A good question to ask is: *How well have the learners completed the task or answered the question?* The second time the recording is played, the participants are given the following simple note-taking task on 'What did the learner say/What would I say?' (see Figure 2). First, the teachers watch the extract of the lesson and note down examples of learner language in the first column. Then, they consider what they would upgrade, reformulate or extend, and discuss their choices with their peers. Once they've chosen which items would be most useful to work with, they fill

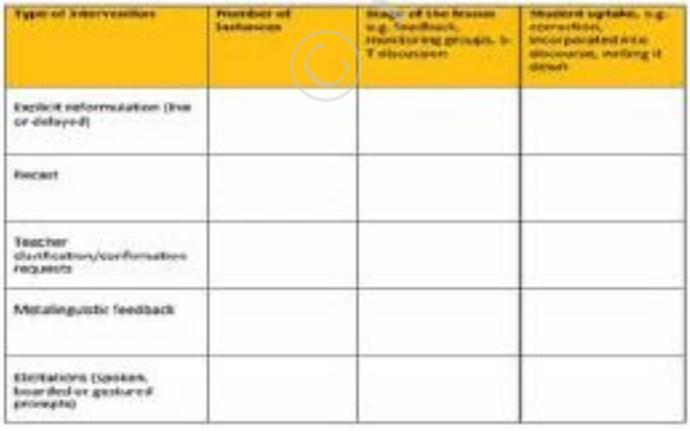

Figure 1 Awareness-raising task

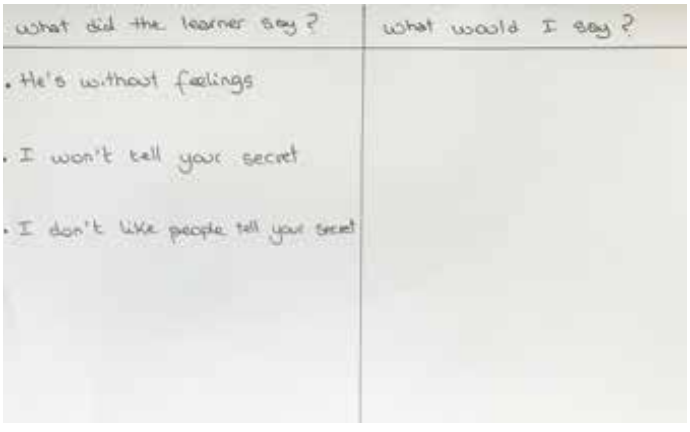

Figure 2 Reformulation task

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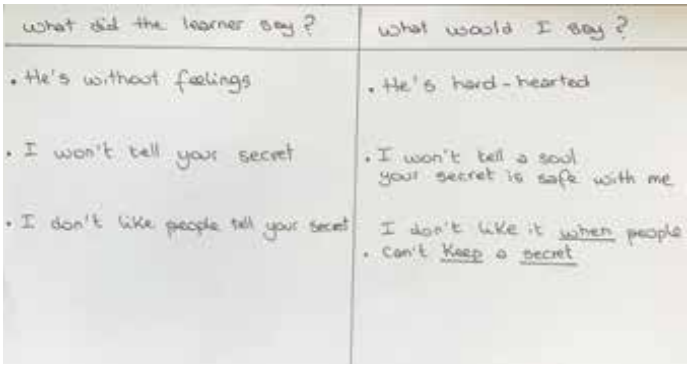

Figure 3 Completed reformulation task

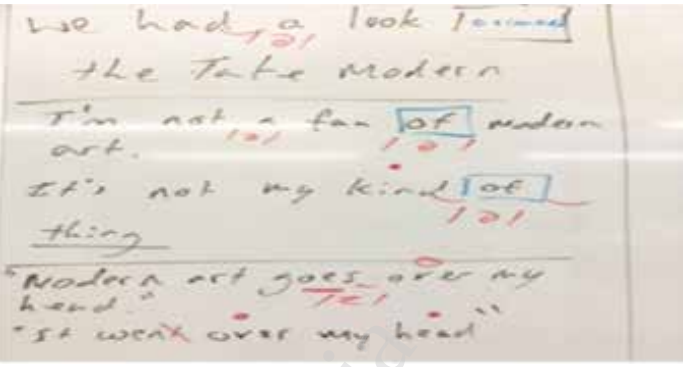

Figure 4 A teacher's boardwork

in the second column with what they think is the most suitable reformulation (see Figure 3).

This is a very simple task, but it has proved highly effective for many of the teachers I have worked with. Teachers I have interviewed after using this task have commented that they found it a useful exercise when examining their own teaching or watching colleagues teach. Some found it a useful tool for monitoring, whilst others found it useful for deciding what language they could put up on the board for feedback on tasks. Again, it is good if you can demonstrate how the task works in an input session or workshop *first*, as, by having experience of using the task and seeing how it works, you can encourage the teachers to try it out for themselves. This task mainly focuses on the 'what' of emergent language, and there are not necessarily correct or incorrect options: rather, choices that can be explored. In turn, this can help frame discussions on when and how to deal with language – ie delayed or on the spot – and how to use the board to record feedback. A further resource that readers might like to look at with more ideas like this is an IH London Blog from 2014 a colleague and I wrote on the topic (*www.ihlondon.com/blog/posts/2014/giving-feedback-on-language/*).

Recording language on the board

The next task is one I still use myself when I teach, and this is something that I encourage teachers that I work with to do. Firstly, the teacher photographs their board, so that they can see what emergent language has arisen in the lesson and how it was dealt with. In a follow-up input session or workshop, participating teachers bring in examples of their boards and, together, identify the topic of the lessons and the technique the teacher may have used to draw attention to language, eg gaps, blank boxes, colours to highlight form and phonology, etc (see Figure 4). Good questions to ask are: *What areas of language are being focused on in the feedback? What techniques has the teacher used to elicit reformulations?* This activity can provide teachers with options of how to draw attention to emergent language and involve the learners in reformulation work. It also provides a record of what has arisen in class, and what can be followed up in future lessons.

♦ ♦ ♦

Working with emergent language is necessary, as it responds to the demands of the learners' internal syllabus and can provide opportunities to challenge and push the learners linguistically as well. However, there is very little published advice on how teachers can work with emergent language, and this article has hopefully provided the reader with awareness-raising and experiential activities to aid teacher learning in this complex area. These activities do not set out to provide hard and fast guidelines for working with emergent language, but, rather, to stimulate noticing of classroom interaction and the language that emerges from it, and to create a space for discussion about teaching and learning. Finally, they seek to put the teacher in control of their own development and sow the seeds for further investigation of classroom interaction and how they respond to learners and learner language. ■

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Intercultural collaboration

Sandi Ferdiansyah and **Kenia Ninoska Obando** tell a tale of international cooperation – online.

Communicating in a foreign language across different cultures can be a challenging task for language learners, as there are different elements that have to be taken into consideration, such as history, beliefs, values, etc. Developing the students' intercultural communication competence is, therefore, a key element in English language teaching – and it is important, because it promotes sensitivity in each individual, as they become aware of the value of their own culture and, at the same time, come to understand the diversity of the cultures of others.

To help our learners to get a first-hand experience of intercultural communication, we set up an online collaboration project between a university in East Java, Indonesia – the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Jember – and a university in Nicaragua – the Universidad Centroamericana UCA. This online collaboration had the aim of helping the students of both countries to develop their intercultural awareness, to enhance their technological literacy through the use of different tools to create audiovisual content, to encourage them to share their opinions and ideas –particularly in the context of ELT – and, hopefully, to build friendship between the two ELT communities. At the end of the project, the students were expected to create digital stories that incorporated intercultural values.

Thirty students participated voluntarily in this online collaboration. The 15 undergraduate students from Indonesia were in their junior year. Their ages ranged from 20 to 21. Fourteen of them were women and there was one man. The 15 undergraduate students from Nicaragua (seven men and eight women) were also in their junior year and ranged in age from 18 to 22. All the participants had reached between pre-intermediate and intermediate level of English proficiency and were expected to reach at least upper-intermediate level when they graduated from university. All the participants came from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. For example, while the Indonesian students spoke Bahasa Indonesia – the official language of Indonesia – most also spoke a number of different indigenous languages (eg Javanese, Madurese and Osingnese).

The following questions – about how the online project started, how it was designed and implemented, what opportunities and challenges both teachers and students experienced, and in what ways the project was monitored and evaluated – are formulated to guide the writing of this article so that other teachers around the globe can reflect on how this experience might be adapted in their own contexts.

How did you start this online collaboration?

Kenia: Sandi and I both participated in a 'Study of the United States Institutes' programme with the University of Montana, USA, in 2016. Since then, we had been trying to find opportunities to work collaboratively. However, it wasn't until this year that we found a way to set up a project that could involve our students. I was in charge of teaching a general pedagogy course for an EFL sophomore group. These were students who were training to become English language teachers themselves, so developing competence in intercultural communication was a crucial part of their professional training. This project created a great opportunity to provide the two groups of learners with the chance to explore and recognise cultural differences using authentic sources and to become culturally sensitive by discovering the cultural riches of different societies.

Sandi: When I contacted Kenia for the first time about this online collaboration, I asked her about the course that she was currently teaching, so that we both could figure out a goal for our project. She was teaching a course on general pedagogy in EFL, and I was teaching an intercultural communication course, so I suggested that we ask our students to get involved in interculturally-based digital storytelling. We define intercultural digital storytelling as the art of telling stories, created digitally, that share the author's own experiences of interaction between their own culture and another culture. Our students were required to make use of photos, either their own or taken from the internet, to illustrate their stories, use video effects, music, their recorded voices, etc, meshed together using a digital tool such as *Photo Story 3* from *Windows, Viva Video*, etc. The examples of intercultural digital storytelling which we used as models can be accessed at *http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu*. A QR code for this site is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1 QR code for some examples of intercultural digital storytelling

How did you design and implement this project?

Kenia: The first thing was to share the programme/syllabus of the courses each of us would be teaching, in order to find elements in common that could form part of our collaboration. Once these elements were identified, we started to organise the project itself. We agreed that it would involve getting the students to use storytelling to describe their reasons for becoming English language teachers. We decided that it

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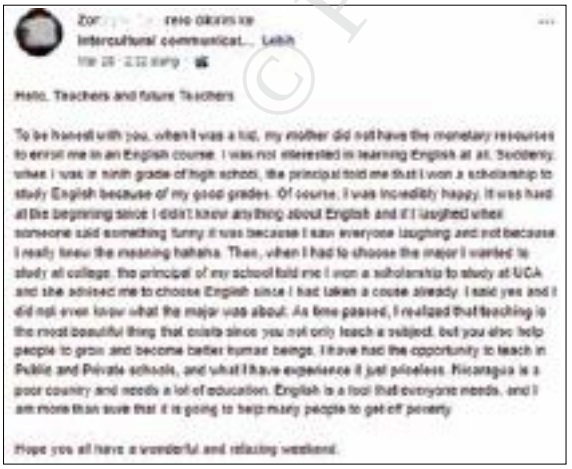
would be necessary to make use of an online platform that would enable us to monitor the students' interactions. For that reason, an *Edmodo* group was created, as a way to facilitate effective communication between the students of both countries. Next, a weekly programme was established and introduced to both groups of students. After that, the students and teachers started to introduce themselves through the platform, in order to create a sense of community that would foster further communication. Then, the students were put into smaller groups, each including both Nicaraguan and Indonesian students, so that they could start exchanging ideas about their stories. To ensure that the students were making equal contributions, we divided them into groups of four and asked each group member to choose a different role, based on their interests and ability: story writer, language editor, video editor and photographer/browser. In this project, the story writer could either write his or her own story or interview the other group members and discuss a joint story together with them. After that, the language editor checked the language, made any necessary revisions, and presented it to the group for discussion. Next, the photographer or photo browser searched for photos, either from the internet or their own collection, to illustrate the story, alongside the story narration, and to make it more alive. When everything was set, the video editor was responsible for mixing the voice-over narration, the photos, the video effects and the music, using the digital tool they selected to create a digital story. Figure 2 shows the draft of one student's story as it was presented to the others in her *Edmodo* group.

Sandi: We set a timeline for making this project effective and meaningful. This is shown in Figure 3. We designed a task-based digital storytelling activity that would incorporate intercultural values, such as beliefs, attitudes and identity – things which would later influence the students'


Hello, Teachers and future Teachers

To be honest with you, when I was a kid, my mother did not have the monetary resources to enroll me in an English course. I was not interested in learning English at all. Suddenly, when I was in ninth grade of high school, the principal told me that I won a scholarship to study English because of my good grades. Of course, I was incredibly happy. It was hard at the beginning since I didn't know anything about English and if I laughed when someone said something funny it was because I saw everyone laughing and not because I really knew the meaning hahaha. Then, when I had to choose the major I wanted to study at college, the principal of my school told me I won a scholarship to study at UCA and she advised me to choose English since I had taken a course already. I said yes and I did not even know what the major was about. As time passed, I realized that teaching is the most beautiful thing that exists since you not only teach a subject, but you also help people to grow and become better human beings. I have had the opportunity to teach in Public and Private schools, and what I have experience it just priceless. Nicaragua is a poor country and needs a lot of education. English is a tool that everyone needs, and I am more than sure that it is going to help many people to get off poverty.

Hope you all have a wonderful and relaxing weekend.

Figure 2 An example draft of one student's story

Weeks	Tasks	Goals
Week 1	The students introduced themselves. They each wrote a description of themselves (50 words minimum). They followed up this introduction with questions and answers exchanged via *Edmodo*.	■ To help the students get along and create a pleasant atmosphere ■ To engage the students in communication
Week 2	The students were asked to talk about the reasons why they were learning English and/or wanted to become an English teacher in the future. Additionally, they were asked to talk about the educational system in their countries. They continued with questions and answers if they were interested in finding out more details.	■ To build the students' interest in learning ■ To help the students recognise the similarities and differences in their goals as language learners ■ To help the students gain knowledge about each other's countries
Week 3	The students were divided into groups of four (two Nicaraguans and two Indonesians) to work together for the entire project. During this stage, the teachers provided examples of digital storytelling (see Figure 1), followed by discussion questions about the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of these digital stories. The intrinsic elements included character, setting and time, while the extrinsic elements included the values embodied by the story.	■ To develop the students' collaboration skills ■ To build their knowledge of digital storytelling
Week 4	The students were encouraged to think about their own digital story ideas. Suggested topics that they could choose included: becoming an English teacher in an EFL country, a pre-service teacher's perception of English language teaching and learning, awareness of intercultural communication, etc. They were asked to share their story topic and their reason for selecting it. They were also told that their digital stories should be limited to a maximum of five minutes.	■ To help the students find topics for their stories ■ To exercise their critical thinking and creativity
Week 5	Each group was encouraged to share the early progress of their stories on the *Edmodo* platform. The members of the other groups provided feedback, comments and appreciation of their friends' work.	■ To encourage the students to share opinions and feedback ■ To help them build respect and appreciation
Week 6	The students continued to work with their groups to complete their stories, double-checking the language, making any necessary adjustments to the photographs, visual effects, music and voice-over, producing the story digitally using a digital tool such as *Photo Story 3*, *Viva Video*, etc.	■ To help the students develop their language skills ■ To help them develop their technical skills
Week 7	The students were asked to present their digital stories to each other and celebrate their success in completing the project.	■ To build the students' confidence ■ To encourage them to show respect for the other students' work
Week 8	The students were given self-assessment forms and asked to complete reflective journals to reveal how much they had contributed to the project and what experience they gained from the project.	■ To help the students develop their reflective practice

Figure 3 Project timeline

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perceptions and behaviour when they were interacting with people from different cultures. The intention was that these values should be infused in the stories they created.

We began by building the students' knowledge of the digital story genre, helping them develop the structure of their stories, engaging them in the process of writing and publishing and presenting their work. Each week, the students submitted a report via *Edmodo*. Although the tasks were scheduled, both Kenia and I agreed to be very flexible in terms of timing and deadlines.

What were the challenges and the opportunities?

Kenia: One of the challenges the students had during the implementation of this project had to do with time difference: between Nicaragua and Indonesia there is a 12-hour difference. This made it difficult for the students to communicate at a time that was convenient for all and to discuss the elements of their project together. To solve this issue, some of the groups agreed on establishing a specific time during the day that would work for all of them – a time that was not too late for some or too early for others.

Another challenge was that *Edmodo* is an asynchronous online learning platform. Although this fact helped the students a lot when they did not have internet access – they could catch up on another day – lack of internet access resulted in huge delays in the interaction and discussion. To fill the gap, Sandi and I agreed that each group of students could use a low-cost messaging app such as *WhatsApp*, so that they could interact and discuss the project in a more timely way.

Sandi: Intercultural communication provided the students with new yet meaningful information. For example, this online collaboration was done during Ramadan (the Muslim holy month) when the Indonesian Muslim students fasted for the whole month. Although the Indonesian students might have had to work harder and spend more energy on this project, it became an opportunity for them to share their religious and spiritual routines with their new friends. From this, I expected that this sharing would build tolerance among the students. In addition, this project not only represented a great opportunity for the students to exchange experiences with other language learners from a totally different culture and to learn from them to embrace diversity, but also they could practise their English outside the classroom in a more authentic and meaningful environment. For example, they could build confidence in speaking totally in English with their partners through chatting or videoconferencing and practise peer-reviewing.

How did you monitor and evaluate the project?

Kenia: Through the creation of a common *Edmodo* group, it was possible to monitor some of the interactions the students and teachers had through that platform. As all the students were studying from home because of the Covid-19 epidemic, most communication was done via emails and *Zoom* sessions, and the students informed their teacher about their advances or doubts. Also, the students had to complete certain tasks every week, such as defining their storytelling topic, sharing their first draft, etc, so this allowed the teachers to monitor and assess the progress that the students were making throughout the process.

Sandi: To help us monitor their learning and encourage them to reflect on how much they had contributed to their group, the students were given a self-assessment form. This used a scale from 1–5 on their performance in the areas of contribution, creativity, collaboration, language learning and intercultural learning.

In addition to this self-assessment, the students were asked to write a learning journal that described their learning experience. There is an example in Figure 4.

In the middle of this project, the Covid-19 pandemic affected many countries, including Indonesia and Nicaragua. It forced all of us to stay away from school, learning and working from home. Our online collaboration project enabled the participants to reflect on the use of technology for educational purposes and to engage in virtual communication. Additionally, it helped the teachers and students from two different cultural and geographical backgrounds to gain a real-life experience of how to communicate using language which was not their mother tongue, and to respect the cultural diversity of the two countries. ■

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> At first, I am so excited to join this project because we will have new experiences. We may discuss with our friends and our teacher face to face but there is covid-19 pandemic. I face many problems to manage my time to learn college material, do many assignments, household and this project also. I feel very worried about my ICC project because I am afraid I cannot do this project well. However, day by day passes, I share this experience with my close friend who join this project also. We share our problems, hear it each other and motivate each other. I can manage my time, enjoy this project too. This project is very useful and interesting. We can have collaboration with other country, make a friend, share our cultures each other even though it is hard to communicate each other regularly. We still keep trying to connect and also make this project as new experience not a burden. (Iqva – 12/5/2020)

Figure 4 An excerpt from one student's learning journal

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In this series, **Nicky Hockly** explains aspects of technology which some people may be embarrassed to confess that they don't really understand. In this article, she explores live online classes for younger learners.

Five things you always wanted to know about

teaching younger learners live online

(but were too afraid to ask)

1 Why hold live online classes with younger learners?

The recent (current, at the time of writing) Covid-19 pandemic has seen school closures and teachers suddenly having to teach online. In most cases, this has meant young learners doing a lot of asynchronous work from home, eg using online language learning materials, apps and games, etc. But in many cases, it has also meant teachers holding real-time online classes with their learners via videoconferencing.

2 I teach young learners aged five to eight. How do I start teaching live online?

First, ask yourself some questions. For example: *What videoconferencing tool should I use? Should I involve the parents and, if so, how? What activities can I do in my live online classes? How can I keep my young learners engaged and motivated?*

Now read on for some suggested answers ...

3 What about safety and privacy concerns? I've heard that some videoconferencing tools are not safe for young learners.

The security features of videoconferencing tools have been in the spotlight recently, and security has been improved. For example, *Zoom* has added additional default password protection to permit access to a live class, a default waiting room from where the teacher allows individuals to join, and the capacity for teachers to be able to lock meetings. *Google Meet* is part of the *Google* suite of tools, and teachers can create a meeting room for learners from within the secure environment of *Google Classroom*. Whatever videoconferencing tool you or your school uses, carry out an online search to check what the latest security features are. Security for most videoconferencing tools is pretty good now, certainly compared to a year ago!

4 What should I do about the parents?

It is crucial for parents to understand the benefits of live online classes. First, inform the parents (for example, by email) of how, when and why live classes will be held with their children. Include information about the types of activities you will do, how long and how often the children will need to be online, and what the parent or caregiver's role will be. Explain how safety and privacy is maintained in your chosen videoconferencing platform. Then hold a live online meeting in the platform with the parents only, to discuss all of this and to answer their questions and concerns. Working collaboratively with the parents from the outset will help to ensure that they support your live online classes. It can also strengthen the home–school connection, which research shows can positively affect student outcomes over the long term.

5 What activities can I do in a live online class with younger learners?

Some of the activities that you do in your face-to-face classes can be carried out online very effectively, by exploiting the camera. For example:

- Have a regular (eg weekly) 'story time', in which you read a storybook aloud to your learners, showing the pictures to camera and eliciting words.
- Include activities with movement, eg 'Mime and guess the verb'; the 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes' song; 'Simon says'.
- Hold a scavenger hunt to review vocabulary: ask your learners to fetch items from around the house, and to show them to the group via the camera, eg items of clothing, stationery, a favourite toy, objects of a specified colour, etc.
- Teach your learners a new song and sing it together every time you meet online.
- Do a picture dictation: describe a picture that your learners have to draw with coloured pencils; the learners then share their drawings with the class via the camera, pointing out the items and colours.
- Use flashcards: to review vocabulary, hold flashcards up to the camera and ask the learners to say the words. Ask each student to choose a word and to draw their own flashcard to show to the class in the next lesson.

The key to successful live online classes with very young learners is to include a *variety* of (connected!) activities, to involve the learners in activities by getting them to *do* something, and to keep things *short*. The younger the learners, the shorter the online class should be. For younger learners, classes of 15–30 minutes several times a week are more effective than hour-long classes once or twice a week. But most importantly – have fun! ■

Nicky Hockly is Director of Pedagogy of The Consultants-E, an online teacher training and development consultancy, and she is the prize-winning author of many books about language teaching and technology. The Consultants-E (*www.theconsultants-e.com*) offers online educational technology training courses for English language teachers, including *Teaching Live Online* and *e-Moderation*.

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Webwatcher

Russell Stannard recommends recording with *Flipgrid*.

One thing we often want to do, as teachers, is to get our students speaking. For most students, this is one of the main reasons they want to learn English, and yet it can often pose some of the biggest challenges both inside and outside class. *Flipgrid* is a tool that has been around for a while now. It offers the chance for the students to create video recordings to answer questions that you have posed. So, instead of the students *writing* their answers in forum posts, they *record* them. This encourages sharing of information and, of course, helps them develop their oral skills.

Getting started

Setting up a *Flipgrid* account is straightforward, using either a *Microsoft* or *Google* account to sign in. You can't sign up any other way, and it is important to understand this, because the same applies to your students. They will also have to log in using an email account. Some teachers don't like this. Personally, I always suggest that my students create a 'spare' email account that they can use to sign up to the various useful websites and online learning tools. It is easy to create an extra *Gmail* account.

When you have set up your account and recorded your first question, you will need to share a link to that question, so that the students can listen to it and then record their answers.

Grids and topics

Creating your account basically means setting up your grid. In the free version of *Flipgrid*, you are only allowed to have one grid, but you can have several topics within that grid. Think of the grid as like the general subject, eg *What people do to stay healthy*, and then, as topics, you may have several questions you want your students to answer.

You don't *have* to record your questions, but it obviously makes things more interesting, as the students can develop both their listening and speaking skills by first listening to your question and then recording their response. The students can only record for 90 seconds, but it is surprising how much they can say in that time!

Student recordings

My suggestion is that you spend time in class (in *Zoom*, *Microsoft Teams*, etc) getting the students to prepare for their recordings, but that they actually do the recordings for homework. I have watched a couple of teachers using *Flipgrid*, and to really get value out of the recordings, the students need to plan and craft their replies. In class, they might brainstorm the vocabulary they are going to need to answer the question, and they might actually plan their answer before they record it. Try to encourage them not to script the whole answer but, rather, just have a plan for how they are going to respond. However, some will inevitably end up scripting the whole thing, and my feeling is that, at the start, that is fine. Slowly, as they build up confidence, they will stop doing that.

Feedback options

When you receive the recorded answers from your students, you can send them feedback. So you could set a series of questions, wait until all the students have answered them and then go through their answers one by one, providing feedback and grades. My worry is that, for many teachers, this might be too time-consuming.

However, there *are* alternatives. If you do recordings on a regular basis, you could tell the students that you are going to 'dip into' their recordings and that you aim to listen to, say, 20 percent of them each time. You could also draw their attention to one or two recordings when you do a live lesson, so that the students can see that you are listening to them. Another possibiltiy is to think about peer-evaluation. In the past, I have put the students into pairs and got them to provide feedback to their partner. This works best if you do some training on giving feedback.

♦ ♦ ♦

There are not many tools around that offer anything similar to *Flipgrid*. However, setting up and running it can be a bit confusing. In my opinion, it offers far too many features, and my advice is to keep it simple, particularly at the start. It is a technology that, unfortunately, you do need to spend some time learning, but it can offer you a great way of encouraging your students to record themselves speaking, especially outside class. ■

I have created a video to help you to set up and get started with *Flipgrid*. You can watch this at *www.teachertrainingvideos.com/flipgrid_tutorial*.

Russell Stannard is the founder of *www.teachertrainingvideos.com*, which won a British Council ELTons award for technology.
He is a freelance teacher and writer and also a NILE Associate Trainer.

Keep sending your favourite sites to Russell:
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Not only, **but also …**

Chia Suan Chong looks at what English teachers teach apart from language. In this issue, she looks at how we support our students' wellbeing.

Wellbeing is roughly defined as a state of being comfortable, healthy and happy. It is the feeling that we are enjoying a good quality of life. And, unfortunately, as different forms of social isolation and distancing continue in many countries, many aspects of our wellbeing are starting to suffer because of our circumstances – whether we are that parent trying to juggle working from home with homeschooling and childcare, or the recently-unemployed whose financial situation is keeping them up at night, or someone who lives alone or estranged from their family and is struggling with loneliness – our circumstances may be different, but many of us are feeling the effects of our 'new normal' and unsure of how to deal with it.

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In a face-to-face situation, teachers might notice students who display a sudden change in mood or behaviour, but virtual classes have made it much more difficult for teachers to spot students who are struggling with wellbeing issues. That said, some students might find it safer to express their true emotions and thoughts when hiding behind the security of a keyboard. And with the right tasks and discussion questions, we could potentially find out how our students are *really* coping in these difficult times.

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According to the old saying, a problem shared is a problem halved, and the first step towards supporting our students' wellbeing is getting them to talk about what they're going through and how they're feeling. Undoubtedly, these are difficult topics, and we need to approach them with large amounts of sensitivity and understanding. A colleague of mine got her class to create a combined word cloud using words that expressed how they felt about their situation. In one of my webinars, a 'List the top ten things you need in a lockdown' activity had my trainees really opening up in the chat box. Whether you're asking your students to express how they are feeling using emojis/gifs, or putting them into pairs to debate the pros and cons of working from home, there are a variety of ways of broaching the subject in a light and unintimidating manner. But for classes that know each other well, a simple *How are you all doing during these mad times?* might be all that is needed for the students to share their thoughts and feelings.

Through conversations, we might then notice that our students' wellbeing needs improving. Recent research has shown that individuals can actively maintain and improve their wellbeing through these five key ways:

1 Being active

Doing exercise and staying active can be challenging in a lockdown situation, so it might be helpful to get the students to suggest innovative ways of doing this from home. Teachers could set challenges in the forms of *YouTube* workouts or *TikTok* dance challenges for the students to do in their own time. The students could even share photos of their accomplishments with their classmates.

2 Taking notice

Being aware of ourselves and the things around us can help us enhance our wellbeing, and it is with this knowledge that mindfulness exercises have grown in popularity both in schools and companies over the last decade. By getting the students to take a moment to inhale deeply and notice the sights, smells or sounds around them, or finding time to appreciate the things we are grateful for, we can help them clear their minds, become more centred and focus on the positives.

3 Giving

Research has shown that being kind and helping others has a direct correlation with our own wellbeing. An internet search of the term 'random acts of kindness' brings up many ideas for students to take on. Which of these could be done from home? Combining the theme of 'giving' with 'taking notice', the website *ActionForHappiness.org* contains free calendars with daily challenges for people to focus on (24th June requires you to thank a friend for the joy they bring to your life, while 25th June encourages you to savour the food that makes you feel good).

4 Learning

As educators, we might already know of the therapeutic benefits of learning – it motivates, improves self-esteem and gives the learners something to focus on. What can we do to get our students to continue learning outside the (virtual) classroom? Could we encourage them to watch a film in English? Or have an ongoing discussion on *WhatsApp*? Or perhaps we could get them to pick some TED Talks on topics they are interested in and summarise them for the class.

5 Connecting

The very human need to be close to others is probably the trickiest one to fulfil with rules of social distancing in place. However, thanks to broadband, many of us are still able to communicate with our family and friends. Ask the students to share the most interesting/uplifting/innovative social conversation they had during the week. Have they attempted to have a virtual dinner with a friend? Were they able to play a board game on *Skype*?

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For some of our students, meeting their teacher and classmates online could possibly be the one 'social outing' they've been looking forward to all day. By simply remembering that our students are coming to class not just to learn English, but also for the social interaction, we might realise that, as teachers, we cannot avoid our role of supporting our students' wellbeing.

Chia Suan Chong is a teacher trainer, a communication skills trainer, a materials writer and the author of *Successful International Communication* (Pavilion Publishing). She has been delivering online and face-to-face training to clients around the globe since 2005. Based in York, UK, Chia was *ETp*'s resident blogger from 2012 to 2019.
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The Creative Teacher's Compendium

An A–Z guide of creative activities for the language classroom

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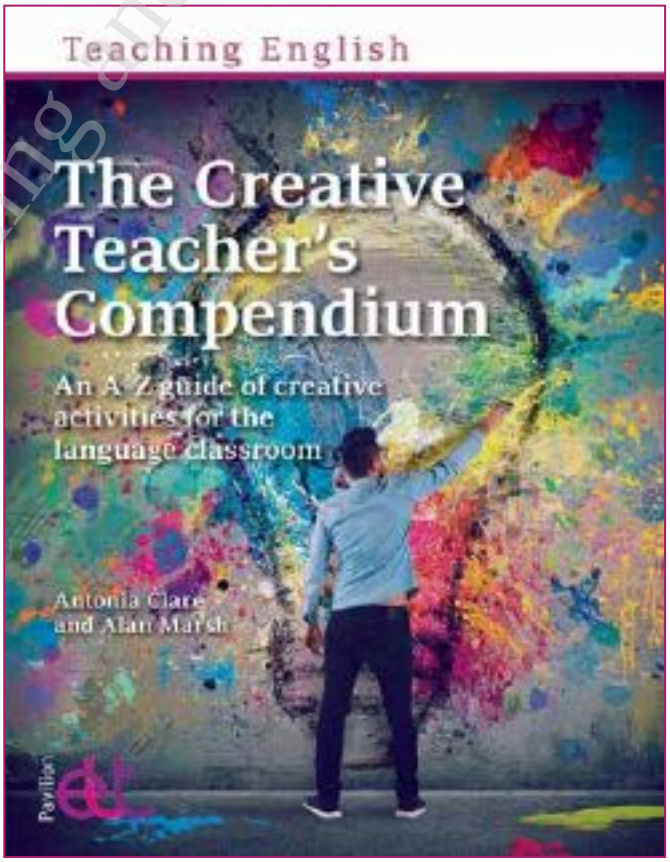
About the authors:

Antonia Clare and Alan Marsh both deliver teacher training in various countries around the world, and regularly speak at conferences. The teachers they meet are forever asking where they can get hold of all their lovely ideas – so they decided to put them in a book.

Antonia Clare and Alan Marsh



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