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May 2020

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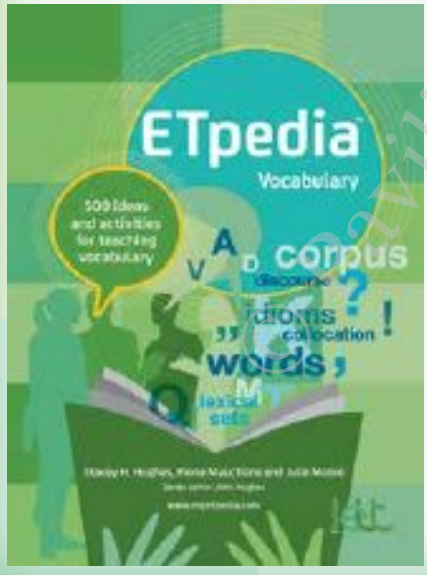

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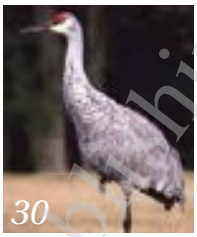

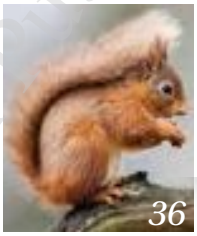

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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REGULAR FEATURES

Includes materials designed to photocopy, some of which can now be downloaded from the *ETp* website (see page 3)

Editorial

We are living in strange times, when a degree of resilience is required of all of us. As might be predicted, English teachers around the world are stepping up to the mark and doing what is necessary to keep their lessons going, whether this means a sudden switch to online teaching with *Zoom* meetings, online webinars and work sent to students via a variety of Virtual Learning Environments – or, where permitted, simply keeping calm and carrying on in the classroom.

As you might expect, I have received a flurry of 'virus-themed' articles over the past month or so, and you will find a number of these in this issue of *ETp*. I have chosen those that I felt could offer the most helpful advice to teachers struggling with the changeover to online teaching – and those that would present a beacon of hope in difficult times. So, thanks to Ulla Fürstenberg and Elke Beder-Hubmann, Anastasiya Shalamay, Julian Burnley, Lucas Kohnke, Huma Hasna Riaz Ahmed, Derek Wong and Russell Stannard for sharing their expertise.

Our main feature, by Danny Norrington-Davies, is not connected to the Covid-19 crisis and is the first of two articles on dealing with emergent language. Danny's article will be followed in the next issue by one from Richard Chinn, which will offer practical tips and techniques on the topic.

We also have three articles on creativity: two of these (by Roxy Lee and Stewart Gray, and by Paul Drury) are about creativity in teaching young learners. The other is by Antonia Clare and Alan Marsh and has two activities for you to try out with learners of any age.

In place of our usual *It Works in Practice* section, in this issue we have a celebration of the Langwich Scool cartoons, drawn by Jon Marks. Sadly, Jon has ended the series after over 20 years. We will miss him.

I would like to finish by sending all of you my very best wishes for the coming weeks, and I hope that you and your students are staying safe and staying well.

Helena Gomm
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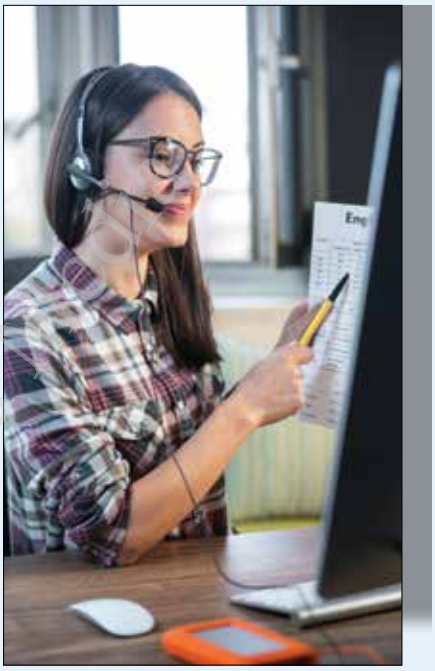


Chichibio and the crane

Once upon a time, there was a rich man called Currado who loved hunting. One day, Currado killed a crane and brought it to his cook, Chichibio.

'Chichibio, take this wonderful bird and prepare a delicious meal for me and my guests.'

Chichibio plucked the crane and began to roast it above the fire. Soon there was a delicious smell of roasting meat.

In the same street, there lived a young woman called Brunetta whom Chichibio desired. Brunetta could smell the delicious meat and came into the kitchen.

'Chichibio, the meat smells so good. Give me a leg, Chichibio.'

'Brunetta, I am roasting this crane for my master, Currado. You won't get what you want from me. You won't get what you want from me.'

'Chichibio, if you don't give me a leg of the roasted crane, you won't get what you want from me. You won't get what you want from me!'

Chichibio thought Brunetta was very beautiful, so he cut off one of the legs and gave it to her.

Then Chichibio brought the plate with the roasted crane to the dinner table where his rich master, Currado, was sitting with his guests.

'What's this, Chichibio? This crane has only one leg!'

'Yes, Master, cranes only have one leg.'

'Nonsense! You think I've never seen a crane? Cranes have two legs, like all birds.'

'No, no, no, Master. Cranes only have one leg, I promise you.'

Currado was angry and jumped to his feet:

'Chichibio, you are a liar!'

'No, Master Currado, if you come down to the lake with me at sunrise tomorrow morning, I'll show you that cranes have only one leg.'

Currado was furious but he didn't want to hit Chichibio in front of his guests.

'Chichibio, I will come with you at sunrise tomorrow and you'll see that cranes have two legs. Then, I'll give you a punishment you won't forget for the rest of your days!'

Currado sent Chichibio away and shared the delicious roasted crane meat with his guests.

That night, Master Currado was still so angry that he could hardly sleep. At sunrise the next morning, he was still feeling angry with his cook, Chichibio, as they made their way down to the lake. All the cranes were still asleep, each one standing on one leg.

'Look! You see, Master Currado, cranes have just one leg, as I told you.'

Currado shouted and clapped his hands loudly, waking and frightening all the cranes. As each crane woke up, it put out its second leg, ran forward, opened its wings, took to the air and flew away.

Currado was angry.

'Chichibio, look! As I told you, all cranes have two legs, not one! You lied to me and now I'm going to punish you!'

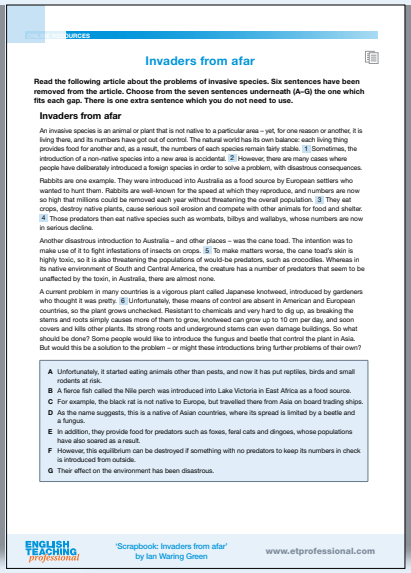
'Master, you are right,' said Chichibio. 'You have shown me that cranes do have two legs. It's amazing. But, dear Master, if you had shouted and clapped at the roasted crane last night at dinner, it would have put out its second leg too.'

Currado was so surprised by Chichibio's answer that his anger suddenly turned to laughter.

'Chichibio, perhaps you're right! Chichibio, you must be right!'

Currado enjoyed Chichibio's answer so much that Chichibio escaped his punishment, and there was once more peace between master and cook.

ENGLISH TEACHING professional 'Students' stories 18' by David Heathfield www.etprofessional.com



Invaders from afar

Read the following article about the problems of invasive species. Six sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the seven sentences underneath (A–G) the one which fits each gap. There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Invaders from afar

An invasive species is an animal or plant that is not native to a particular area – yet, for one reason or another, it is living there, and its numbers have got out of control. The natural world has its own balance: each living thing provides food for another and, as a result, the numbers of each species remain fairly stable. 1 Sometimes, the introduction of a non-native species into a new area is accidental. 2 However, there are many cases where people have deliberately introduced a foreign species in order to solve a problem, with disastrous consequences.

Rabbits are one example. They were introduced into Australia as a food source by European settlers who wanted to hunt them. Rabbits are well-known for the speed at which they reproduce, and numbers are now so high that millions could be removed each year without threatening the overall population. 3 They eat crops, destroy native plants, cause serious soil erosion and compete with other animals for food and shelter. 4 Those predators then eat native species such as wombats, bilbys and wallabys, whose numbers are now in serious decline.

Another disastrous introduction to Australia – and other places – was the cane toad. The intention was to make use of it to fight infestations of insects on crops. 5 To make matters worse, the cane toad's skin is highly toxic, so it is also threatening the populations of would-be predators, such as crocodiles. Whereas in its native environment of South and Central America, the creature has a number of predators that seem to be unaffected by the toxin, in Australia, there are almost none.

A current problem in many countries is a vigorous plant called Japanese knotweed, introduced by gardeners who thought it was pretty. 6 Unfortunately, these means of control are absent in American and European countries, so the plant grows unchecked. Resistant to chemicals and very hard to dig up, as breaking the stems and roots simply causes more of them to grow, knotweed can grow up to 10 cm per day, and soon covers and kills other plants. Its strong roots and underground stems can even damage buildings. So what should be done? Some people would like to introduce the fungus and beetle that control the plant in Asia. But would this be a solution to the problem – or might these introductions bring further problems of their own?

A Unfortunately, it started eating animals other than pests, and now it has put reptiles, birds and small rodents at risk.
B A fierce fish called the Nile perch was introduced into Lake Victoria in East Africa as a food source.
C For example, the black rat is not native to Europe, but travelled there from Asia on board trading ships.
D As the name suggests, this is a native of Asian countries, where its spread is limited by a beetle and a fungus.
E In addition, they provide food for predators such as foxes, feral cats and dingoes, whose populations have also soared as a result.
F However, this equilibrium can be destroyed if something with no predators to keep its numbers in check is introduced from outside.
G Their effect on the environment has been disastrous.

ENGLISH TEACHING professional 'Scrapbook: Invaders from afar' by Ian Waring Green www.etprofessional.com

Chichibìo and the crane

Accompanies 'Students' stories 18' by David Heathfield, page 30

Invaders from afar

Accompanies 'Scrapbook: threats to our world' by Ian Waring Green, page 36

Emergent language

Danny Norrington-Davies researches how experienced teachers work with spontaneous language.

Emergent language is unplanned language that arises spontaneously during genuine interactions in the language classroom. It includes errors or communicative breakdowns produced by students, but it can also be language that teachers or learners judge to be in some way new, interesting or good to share, or language that might require some modification. This can be done by highlighting useful language or offering extensions or alternatives to the forms that the learners produce.

Why should teachers work with emergent language?

Research, eg by Nina Spada and Eun Young Kang and her colleagues, provides evidence that a combination of language-focused and meaning-focused learning leads to greater success for students than a focus on only one or the other. There is, therefore, a strong rationale for working with emergent language in the classroom, as the meaning-focused work comes through the interaction, and the language work is done in feedback. Rod Ellis supports this idea, but also suggests that when learners become aware of a gap during their L2 performance which prevents them from expressing what they want to express, they are sensitised to attend to any input containing the forms they need. This can be done through corrective feedback, amongst other responses, and a number of meta-analyses (eg by Alison Mackey and Jaemyung Goo and by Shaofeng Li) have reported that corrective feedback (the type of emergent language work which has been most studied) has a sizable positive effect on L2 learning. According to Éva Illés and Sumru Akcan, encouraging and exploiting naturally-occurring language also has additional benefits, as it enables learners to experiment, express their own meanings and find their voice.

However, little concrete guidance has been published on working with emergent language, and there is little published research on how teachers currently work with it in lessons generally. Therefore, my colleague Nick Andon and I set out to research this key area. We did this by observing and recording lessons taught by experienced teachers at a private language school and an ESOL college in London, UK, and noted what the teachers did.

How do experienced teachers work with learner language?

The following list shows ten different ways in which the teachers intervened and worked with emergent language during interactions with their learners. Note that many of the terms used below, eg *recast* and *clarification request*, have been used in previous studies, but we believe that the terms *interactional recast* and *recall* are new.

1 **Explicit reformulation (live or delayed):** *Explicit reformulation* refers to a clear and overt provision of an alternative form. As the teacher provides the new form, they clearly indicate that what the student said was inaccurate, inappropriate or could be more natural (eg *You wouldn't say it like that, it's …, It's not really …, it's …*) before providing a more suitable or effective form.

2 **Recast:** *Recasts* involve the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a learner's utterance, minus any indication of error, immediately after the learner produces it. *Recasts* are generally implicit, in that they are not introduced by phrases such as *You mean …* or *You should say … .* A recast could be a sound, word, phrase or full utterance.

3 **Teacher clarification/confirmation request:** A *clarification request* indicates to the learner that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or possibly another learner. A *clarification request* includes phrases such as *What do you mean?* A *confirmation check* indicates that an utterance has been only partially understood or the teacher is unsure, eg *Are you saying that …?* or *So you mean …?*

4 **Metalinguistic feedback:** *Metalinguistic feedback* uses grammatical metalanguage to provide information about the nature of the error or utterance, eg *What type of word goes here?* or *What form of the verb do you need?* It is often used to elicit a more well-formed utterance and can be immediate or delayed.

5 **Elicitation:** *Elicitation* refers to techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the meaning, usage or correct form from the learners, eg by asking clarification questions, strategically

pausing to allow the learners to reformulate their utterance, putting utterances on the board with blanks or errors, or by using gestures. Translation can also be used, eg *How do you say that in Thai? Elicitations* can be live or delayed.

6 **Extension:** *Extension* refers to instances when teachers elicit or provide alternative ways of saying the same thing (eg *stop them cheating / stop them looking up the answers*). It also includes examples of teachers providing related meanings (*woke up early / got up early*) or similar patterns in some way related to the original utterance (*stop them cheating / talking to their partners / checking their messages*).

7 **Interactional recast:** In an *interactional recast*, the teacher provides a more appropriate form whilst maintaining communication or extending the communicative turn, eg *Oh, so you had to hand them in? What happened after that?* There is no indication there is an error, but unlike a *recast*, the teacher responds to the meaning and keeps the communication going.

8 **Recall:** A *recall* is a form of elicitation that refers to lexical items or forms that have been explored or taught in previous lessons, eg *Do you remember the word for …?* or *What was the word we used for that?*

9 **Sharing:** *Sharing* refers to instances where the teacher collects examples of interesting or useful language from a student and shares it with the rest of the class. This often occurs after pairwork or groupwork or task-preparation stages, or because the teacher suspects that the other learners did not pick up on the item.

10 **Learner-initiated intervention:** *Learner-initiated intervention* refers to instances where a learner asks for help with a word or phrase, or indicates that they are unsure of how to complete their utterance, eg *Teacher, how do you say …?*

The results

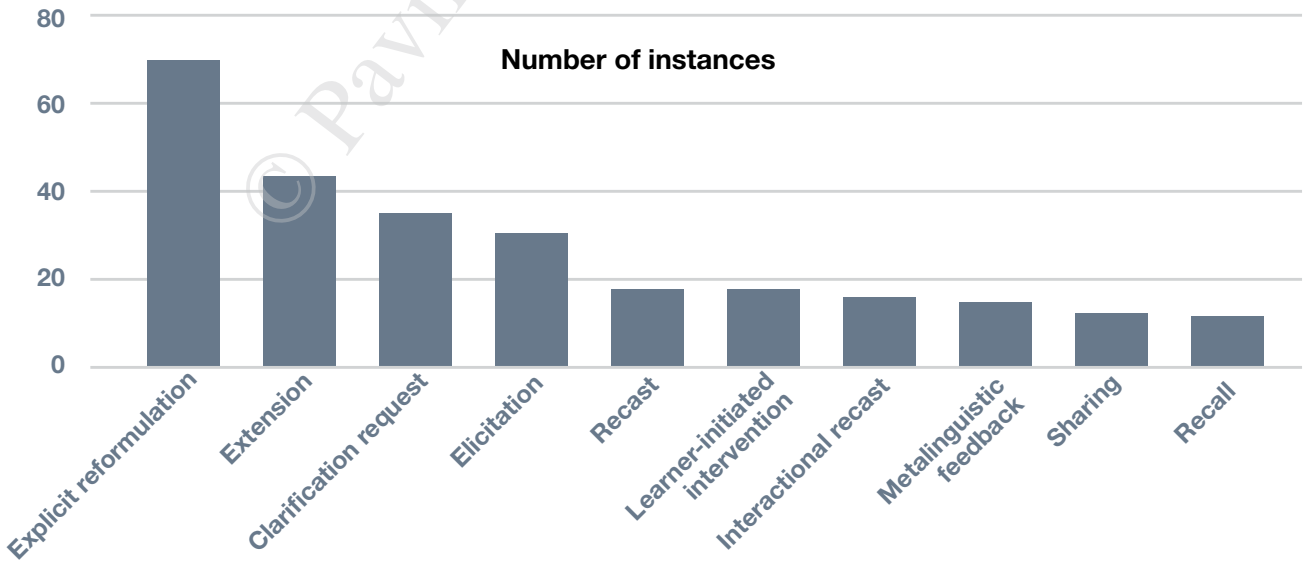
As can be seen in the table below, the most common form of intervention was *explicit reformulation*, which suggested that experienced teachers believed that it was important that the learners paid conscious attention to the language work that followed interaction. We also noted many instances of *clarification requests*, which demonstrated that the teachers felt that it was a good idea to prioritise language that might lead to misunderstanding, rather than focusing only on surface errors such as *-ed* endings or third person *-s*, for example. We also saw teachers building on the language the learners used by offering *extensions*. This shows that they were interested in giving the learners options and building on their lexical awareness, rather than only focusing on errors. It was interesting, though, that we saw comparatively fewer recasts than have been observed in other research.

An interesting finding was that a number of teacher feedback turns involved more than one type of intervention. In the following example (Extract 1), observed during a discussion on the use of mobile phones in class, we see that the teacher makes a *clarification request* as they are not sure what the learner means. When the learner explains, the teacher takes the opportunity during the pause in the meaning-focused interaction to provide some *explicit reformulation*. This is then followed by offering alternatives through an *extension*, thereby extending the learner's lexical range relating to an item they naturally understand.

L3: Maybe students are not curious ... eh ... curious.
T: **What do you mean?** (*Clarification request*)
L5: They must control themselves.
T: I think, maybe ... curious, it could be curious, but I think **'they're not interested in the lesson'**, or **'they're not focused'** (long pause) or 'they're not paying attention'. (*Extension*)

Extract 1

The next example (Extract 2) shows another combination. In this transcript, we see a Bangladeshi learner in an ESOL class describing a childhood memory of her cousin reaching for a guava. When the learner is unable to recall the word *roof* and indicates that they would like assistance (*learner-initiated intervention*), the teacher provides an *explicit reformulation*.



The teacher then quickly checks understanding through a *confirmation request* before the learner carries on with the story.

L7: She were on the (mimes 'roof') **what's that?** (*Learner-initiated*)

L9: Roof.

L7: Roof, yeah.

L6: **What mean roof?** (*Learner-initiated*)

T: Ah, roof. **OK, the roof is the top of the building** (drawing a picture and writing 'on the roof') **so if you've got the building here, the roof is this part**. (*Explicit reformulation*) Is that correct, Shahida? (*Confirmation request*)

L9: Yes.

T: OK.

L7: Then she saw her niece on the roof and try to get guava and she asked her what are you doing there and ... but she said ...

Extract 2 (Thanks to Richard Gallen)

It is interesting to note the instance of uptake at the end of Extract 2, as the learner uses the inputted word to continue the story. This demonstrates that, rather than interrupting the flow of the conversation, as many teachers suggest, teacher (or learner) interventions in fact contribute to that flow by helping the conversation run smoothly. This is also what natural conversations, which are full of false starts, umms and ahhs and clarification requests, really look like.

As discussed above, we saw fewer examples of *recasts* than in other research projects. However, it was interesting to note that when we did see recasts, they usually occurred when the interaction had switched from a communicative mode to a more form-focused one. This suggests to us that the teachers we observed felt that recasts are more effective when the learners have switched their focus to form, rather than when they are done incidentally as the learner communicates. This can be seen in the transcript below (Extract 3), where a learner is describing how they used to hide phones in the school after they were banned from bringing them onto the premises. During the story, the learner indicates with a questioning intonation that they are unsure of the verb they are using (*make it*). Without giving any indication or suggesting there is an issue, the teacher merely recasts, or provides an alternative, more suitable, form (*hide it*). This is repeated when the learner mispronounces the verb when they modify their language. A few turns later, the learner describes how their school was full of phones hidden in air vents!

L2: If we want we bring it like we bring drugs or something. We hidden. We try … We have many ways to … **make it?** (*Learner-initiated*)

T: **To hide it**. (*Recast*)

L2: Hid it.

Teacher: **Hide it**. (*Recast*)

L2: To hide it.

Extract 3

A final interesting point is the number of instances where the teachers hedged when working with emergent language and offering corrections. They did not often suggest that utterances were right or wrong, or use phrases like *That's wrong* or *You can't say that*. Instead, they used more tentative phrases like *I'd go with …* or *For me, this one sounds better*. This suggests a desire not to impose standards, but to give the learners alternatives and improve comprehensibility. This can be seen in Extract 4, where the teacher is giving delayed feedback at the board after the learners have completed a task where they discussed whether mobile phones should be banned in the classroom. Note that this is an example of *explicit reformulation* and *metalinguistic feedback*.

T: (pointing to examples on the whiteboard) **I like this one: *If we didn't use our phones, we didn't die***. You're talking about the present but there is an element of future too, so **I think you need to change this verb** (points to *didn't*).

L: Won't.

T: Um, ***if we didn't use our phones we won't die*? I think that's OK. I'd go with *wouldn't***. (*Explicit reformuatlation*)

Extract 4

♦ ♦ ♦

As emergent language is unplanned and occurs during real-time interaction, choosing to work with it places many demands on the teacher. To begin with, it can be difficult for teachers to notice the language or the gap in the learner's linguistic knowledge. They then must decide whether it merits treatment and determine what the best course of action is. The teacher must also quickly identify alternatives or 'correct' versions, and then consider how they will involve the learners in the intervention. As working with emergent language is a difficult skill, in an article in the next issue of *ETp*, Richard Chinn will outline some tips and techniques for helping teachers to develop their ability to work with it. ■

The research described in this article was conducted while I was seconded at King's College, London. I would like to thank Nick Andon for this opportunity.

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Find your online teacher self!

Ulla Fürstenberg and **Elke Beder-Hubmann** urge you to get your priorities right when teaching in virus times (and beyond).

It is, we are told, unprecedented – the worst crisis since 1945 or since the influenza epidemic of 1918. We are certainly experiencing a situation most of us have never experienced before: strict social distancing, cities on lockdown, curfews in some areas. And yet, daily life has to go on.

For those of us who work in the public sector, this means that our classes still have to be taught. Many of us, therefore, had to transition to online teaching more or less overnight when our schools and universities were closed down – regardless of previous experience, and often without an appropriate, reliable infrastructure in place.

While we are still much better off than our freelance colleagues, who have suddenly lost all their work, let alone all the people, from doctors and nurses to lorry drivers and supermarket cashiers, who have to go out there every day and keep our society from collapsing, this is a stressful situation for us.

To make matters worse, the entire world suddenly has advice for us about teaching online. Institutions, publishers and more tech-savvy colleagues are inundating us with information about all the tools that we absolutely need in this situation – all of them, of course, foolproof and easy to use. It is hard not to feel that you owe it to your learners to use all of the tools that are available to provide the best possible learning experience.

It is not easy in such a chaotic situation, but maybe what we really have to do is take a step back and remind ourselves of some basic priorities. Yes, we should be grateful for the digital tools we have, because they allow us to continue to do our jobs in difficult circumstances – but *that* should ultimately be the goal: doing our jobs as *efficiently* as possible, not deploying as many new *tools* as possible. We should not let all the shiny new things that everybody is pushing on us distract us from that.

Here are some tips for teaching online in these strange times and embracing your online teacher self.

1 Invest in relationships.

Before you even think about transferring *content* and *materials* to whatever online platform you are using, you should think carefully about how you can transfer your *relationships* with your students to the virtual world. Instead of building completely new virtual networks, it is a good idea to think first about what you are already doing. The chances are that there

are online channels of communication that you are already using with your students. Do you, perhaps, email your students regularly? Have you got a group chat with them on an online messaging service? Whatever it is, keep doing it. In a situation that is as fluid and unpredictable as the one we find ourselves in right now, your students will be grateful for a bit of continuity. You can gradually add new tools as you and they adjust to the new situation. An added advantage for *you* is that if, say, your first live-streamed lesson goes wrong because of a technical glitch, it will not be such a big deal, because the channels of communication that you are all used to are still open.

It is a common theme these days that we are 'all in this together', and this well-worn cliché applies to teaching as well. Now, more than ever, you and your students are partners in the learning process, and you can only improve your online teaching if you get feedback from them. The challenge is that online feedback cannot be as immediate as the feedback you get in the classroom. In these busy times, it is easy to fall into the habit of dropping online tasks on your students and assuming that all is well as long as they don't complain. If you really want to know if what you are doing is working for your students, however, you have to encourage them to tell you; and they can only tell you if you are constantly and reliably present in the virtual learning landscape you share. This means taking the time to respond when they email or message you with questions, and being patient when you have to wait for them to respond to *your* questions.

It is also a good idea to be appreciative when they point out mistakes or alert you to technical problems with the tools you are using. They have to feel that their voice is heard, that their contribution is valued and that you are there for them if you want to recreate your classroom relationships online.

2 Get the job done.

Once you have consolidated your online relationship with your students, it's time to focus on the content, and work out which tools can support you best in *delivering* the content to your students. In this phase, it is even more important than in face-to-face teaching to think very carefully about the goal of every single activity, and choose teaching tools accordingly. It is always a good idea to reflect on how you would teach a particular content point and achieve your teaching goal *in the classroom*. You can then think about how you are going to replicate your procedure using online tools: just as methods should always follow content in classroom teaching, online tools should always follow methods.

In some cases, the solution will be obvious. If you usually give a quick presentation and write some examples on the board to explain a grammar point, you will probably decide to film yourself or record a presentation to achieve the same effect. Other classroom procedures are trickier: for example, a 'think–pair–share' sequence. Here, an often overlooked factor comes into play: the technology the students have access to. Especially now, at a time when many parents are working from home, we cannot assume, for example, that younger learners always have access to the family PC. In a situation like this, it is a good idea to choose tools that work on the students' phones.

Another point to consider is whether the teacher has to be present at every stage of an activity. This is only possible if you use some kind of videoconferencing tool, which may be tricky for younger learners to use anyway. Why not ask them to do the pairwork phase of your think–pair–share activity *independently* by contacting their partner on whatever channel they prefer? You can then focus on making sure there is a way they can share their results so that the whole class can benefit. If access to technology is an issue, you can always collect the results yourself on one of the channels you are used to (eg email or the online messaging services mentioned above), summarise them and distribute them back to the students. It may not be very exciting technology-wise, but it gets the job done.

3 Be yourself.

If it is important not to allow technology to dominate your relationship with your students, it is even more important not to let it quash your teacher personality. We all have our individual teaching styles. This means that a tool which is ideal for a colleague's teaching style and personality may simply not work for you, and vice versa. A very analytically-minded teacher will not have a problem designing online work packages for a learning platform weeks in advance; a teacher who is very spontaneous may prefer a mix of tools that offer greater flexibility than a pre-designed virtual learning environment.

One of the challenges we are facing right now in our role as teachers is to find (and embrace) our online teacher *self*. Nobody can know, at this point, whether we will continue to teach online more than before, once it is safe for us to return to the classroom, though this seems likely. In any case, an awareness of our online teacher self is definitely something we will take with us when this crisis is over, and it may prove more valuable than mastery of any particular tool in our future teaching careers.

♦ ♦ ♦

This brings us back to the idea of continuity mentioned above. In this volatile situation, maybe the best thing we can do for our students is to continue to be ourselves and preserve our individual approach and style. Perhaps a little stability is exactly what our students need right now, and maybe this is, above all, what we should aim to deliver online.

On the next pages, you will find some examples of Elke's experiences of switching to teaching online. ■

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Find your online teacher self!

Remote control:
Elke's example experiences

1 Ten year olds at A1 level

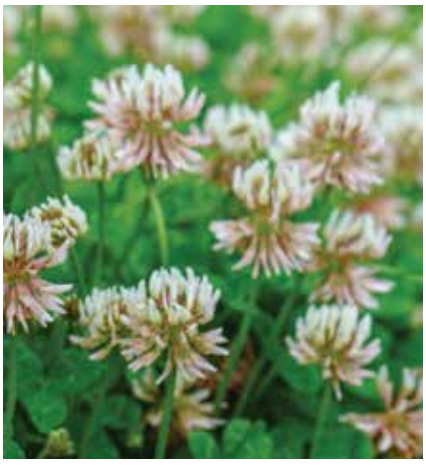
In Austrian secondary schools, we generally work with the same group of students over a long period of time (between two and eight years). This has proved particularly helpful in the current situation because it allows us to establish rapport with our students and we can, therefore, build on the familiar routine that we already follow in our face-to-face classes in our online teaching. For example, my co-teacher, Mr Frog, is a finger puppet that my ten-year-old students appreciate very much: not only does he help reluctant speakers to speak up in class, but he also plays a vital role in all kinds of grammar explanations and activities. When I left school in a rush before the lockdown, I left Mr Frog behind in the drawer of my desk, which prompted me to develop a set of creative lessons around my other finger puppet – Mr Monkey.

When it comes to content, one of the guidelines the Austrian Ministry of Education issued for 'remote' teaching was that we should avoid introducing too many new things during this period. For me, that meant that I needed to draw up a three-week micro-syllabus based on the present simple tense. Since all my students have mobile phones and are experts in creating videos, Mr Monkey now serves as the model who informs them about his day via recorded video messages. He also assigns tasks to them which, in teacher jargon, would be termed *dictations*, *dictoglosses*, *presentations*, *self-correction*, etc, but which have a game-like feel for the students, thanks to the presence of Mr Monkey.

While the technical skills needed on the part of the *teacher* for this kind of teaching include producing videos and narrating stories with storytelling tools such as *Shadow Puppet Edu*, the *students* don't need to get used to a lot of new technology, because they use their phones automatically anyway and only have to learn how to upload their videos onto a virtual platform.

The big advantage of using stuffed animals for these kinds of tasks is that the students can relate to them, and they like to show off their own toys, too. Unlike other kinds of student-produced videos, there are no privacy issues, either. You never see the students' faces on the screen: there is just a video or a picture of a toy they like. They enjoy trying to outdo each other in little videos in which they talk about their own stuffed animals – like Mrs Broccoli, who thinks that broccoli is incredibly boring, or Mr Alligator, who is sitting in a bed of daffodils, and never never never eats beans (for obvious reasons, which my student described very colourfully).

After a few lessons with Mr Monkey, a friend's English-speaking daughter became Mr Monkey's assistant and introduced Mr Sheep from Ireland as another co-teacher. Mr Sheep often eats clover, which is a word you would never read in Austrian schoolbooks at level A1, but which my students are now using happily after I sent them a picture of clover to show what it is (see below).



For me, as a teacher, this personalised method of teaching reflects what I see as my most important mission: to provide my students with a lively and creative learning environment that is both engaging and authentic. And going back to relationships, one really touching thing I have noticed is that it is often the shy students who impress me with great performances with a touch of humour when they have time to prepare and when they are not worried about speaking in front of an audience.

2 Seventeen year olds at B2 (+) level

At the other end of the range of ages and levels that I teach, there are my 17-year-old students, whose language skills are a rock-solid B2 (+) level. In the time we have been working together, they have been involved in many projects, for example my cooperation with Graz University, where they acted as school buddies for student teachers of English. My teaching has been driven throughout by their insatiable curiosity to learn and explore, and whenever I develop new materials or courses I have relied on their valuable feedback.

As they are all techno-literate, the technical side of teaching them remotely is easily explained: I only had to look at the variety of online learning platforms and learning devices that were available and decide which one to use. I appreciate all the advantages that these platforms are said to offer – for example, administrative support, which is important for students who need a gentle technical nudge sometimes, as a reminder to meet deadlines.

What has turned out to be the real challenge for me is precisely the element of creativity in my teaching that this group is used to, not in terms of technology, but in terms of performance and personality. These students enjoy critical discussions and express their opinions freely whenever they feel the urge to do so. In the classroom, I rely heavily on methods that allow them a certain degree of choice and autonomy in their learning. Incidentally, this aspect is also included in the Austrian curriculum for modern foreign languages, which explicitly encourages teachers to choose teaching methods that the students can relate to.

Here are some of the solutions I have found to transfer my real-world teaching style to remote teaching:

- My independent study list (ISL) covers a wide range of topics. It is always accessible to the students, and I update it on a regular basis, very often based on students' recommendations. The materials that my students can choose from range from podcasts and articles to links and videos. Normally, the students choose what they want to work on, based on one-to-one meetings with me, which are similar to appraisal interviews. The work can be part of their homework assignments or serve as a basis when we flip the classroom. In remote teaching, the students have the same list, but they fill in an online form to keep track of what they have done, and they leave messages on *vocaroo.com* to express their opinions on the various materials they have picked from the list. Of course, there are online meetings as well that allow me to talk to the students one to one, but this class, in particular, needs a combination of personal interaction with the freedom to set their own pace and follow their interests, the way they do in the classroom.
- Pictures and videos are part of our students' authentic online world, though this is a world that we usually don't share with them. Since a number of international language proficiency exams, as well as our national final exam, use pictures as part of the speaking and writing prompts, it was an obvious choice to explore this option. In my regular classroom teaching, one of my favourite sites is *What's going on in this picture?* in the *New York Times* (*www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture*). On further investigation, it turned out that this idea is provided by Visual Thinking Strategies (*https://vtshome.org/*), an American NGO which encourages critical thinking based on pictures and works of art.

In a face-to-face class, I discuss the images with my students and we always have very interesting conversations, based on their reactions and ideas. Whenever they have questions I can react spontaneously and give them background information to help them go beyond the picture. However, I struggled to replicate this kind of student-led interaction online. Even though I was able to use all kinds of streaming tools with these older students to do online teaching, this turned out not to be the same experience at all.

What we decided to do instead was to post a picture or a video and start our own chat based on this. The number of replies to a post soon made it obvious whether a particular picture resonated with the students and sparked a conversation or not, and I was able to react to this feedback accordingly, either by providing a new visual prompt if the photo was proving unsuccessful, or by encouraging the students to go deeper into the topic if there was plenty of interest in it.

- For my teacher training seminars, and to share my ideas with a broader audience, I decided to go down a different route and use *Instagram* instead. I am now in the process of developing an *Instagram* platform (you can find it at *elke_beder*) based on ideas for different kinds of creative speaking and writing tasks. Here is one of my tasks as an example:

I am planning to continue to add more of these kinds of tasks, even once we return to the classroom.

From face-to-face to online

Anastasiya Shalamay tries to get the balance right.

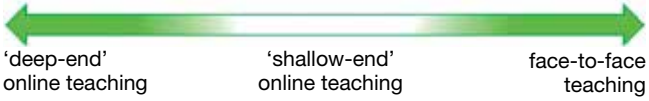
When the coronavirus quarantine started, the biggest complaint that I heard from my colleagues and ex-trainees who had just switched to teaching online was not about the new tools, but the fact that we're all working with students who are biased against online courses. After all, if they believed in the effectiveness and flexibility of online courses, they wouldn't have chosen face-to-face ones in the first place. Moreover, their switch to online learning was forced – and not by something pleasant, but by unexpected and unfavourable conditions. In such a situation, what should we do to ease the tension and persuade them to stay with the course?

From a school manager's perspective, taking face-to-face classes and running them in an online environment seems like the most hassle-free option. With modern conferencing tools, everything seems possible: in *Zoom*, for example, there are 'breakout rooms' for groupwork, a digital whiteboard and an annotation function that lets you highlight whatever you're showing on the screen.

Teachers who haven't previously taught online are excited to see a new teaching context opening in front of them as soon as this app is installed; students stop experiencing any particular problems – with some practice. But is this transfer 'from face-to-face to online' really the best online teaching option? Isn't the whole concept of 'just like face-to-face, but online' not just erroneous, but restrictive?

Deep or shallow?

To make this more illustrative, let's imagine the following cline:



The terms 'deep-end' (or 'strong') and 'shallow-end' (or 'weak') have long been used by ELT authors such as Anthony Howatt and Jim Scrivener to distinguish between different versions of the same approach or technique. It seems to me that these terms could also be used to describe the current state of online teaching.

On a 'deep-end' online course, you meet your students online, establish a rapport with them online, and come up with your own online content, which you usually organise in a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment, ie platform) such as *Moodle*, *Edmodo*, *GoogleClassroom*, etc. Such courses have a whole range of advantages over face-to-face ones: flexibility and more autonomy (they rely heavily on asynchronous tasks, even though they – especially language courses – often include live sessions); many self-study options; opportunities for differentiation by posting extra tasks for students, etc. These are exactly the reasons why more and more teachers choose *blended learning*: using 'deeper-end' online learning to complement a face-to-face course. The drawback is that creating 'deep-end' courses demands time, knowledge of syllabus design and VLEs, and very well-developed technical skills. Roughly speaking, just as students in a traditional face-to-face class expect to see a coursebook, so students in an online class expect to see an online 'coursebook' too – but it is *you* who will be doing the job of both the coursebook author and the publisher. Obviously, if your students need to get back to studying next Monday, tailoring a 'deep-end' online course between now and then is not an option, which automatically makes 'shallow-end' teaching a more realistic choice: turning face-to-face classes into synchronous online sessions.

Despite such lessons taking place online, they are still somewhere between 'pure' online teaching and face-to-face classes, hence my cline. In particular, I would like to reflect on the 'shallowest' version, the one that requires minimal teacher training. This version consists of:

- using a coursebook as a principal resource rather than just a syllabus;
- imitating face-to-face teaching techniques and activities;
- imitating face-to-face classroom management techniques (eg students read out the questions from the coursebook, one by one);

One might argue that this is exactly what face-to-face students expect when switching to an online course for the first time. Some directors of studies or teacher trainers may even choose not to distinguish between face-to-face and online teaching evaluation criteria when assessing online teachers. But why is it still important to draw a difference between the various types, and what exactly is the problem with the 'shallow-end' approach?

Striking a balance

The truth is that such a version can boast the advantages of *neither* face-to-face *nor* online teaching, which makes it unlikely to succeed if we take into account the number of face-to-face offers usually available. It isn't place-based, which is appealing, but it's far from being flexible (it's based only on live sessions that take place once at a certain time and aren't recorded), requires having a printed coursebook nearby, and is more problematic: even with good internet bandwidth, your students may have connection issues. Also, it would be a lie to claim that monitoring and helping students out in breakout rooms is as effective as doing the same thing in class. The challenge increases when some students start scrolling their *Facebook* newsfeed instead, even though *Zoom* will show you that they've lost focus. The list can go on, but the main issue is that, despite some fundamental ELT principles working well in *any* context, there's very little good in trying to cram *all* the face-to-face techniques into an online environment. And why should online classes simply mimic face-to-face methods when they can offer much more instead?

Think about your face-to-face classes. How often do they use authentic materials from the internet in the lesson – and not just texts, but real websites and services? Can you take them out, say to a shopping mall, to practise the new language they've just learnt? Are the roleplay phone calls and group discussions really communicative, or can the learners still see and overhear each other? All of this becomes possible with 'deeper' versions of online learning, and I strongly believe that in order to persuade our students of its effectiveness, we should design new tasks that emphasise these 'deeper-end', authentic elements, rather than try to compete with or imitate face-to-face teaching.

Balanced online activities

Here are some examples of successful online activities and techniques I've tried with my classes. I used *Zoom*, but you can try them with other conferencing apps. The tasks are easy to set up and don't require many extra tools. If you would like to use *Zoom* or compare it to another app you're using, there are some very practical entries on the topic in Sandy Millin's blog: *https://sandymillin.wordpress.com*.

Note: For these activities, the students don't really need to have a coursebook (you'll be adapting it anyway), but they *do* need to type, move fragments of a text round and use a web browser, so a laptop is a better option for them to use than a mobile phone.

	Face-to-face element	Online element	How does it help online learning stand out?
Receptive skills	Short texts that are included for generating interest rather than language work	Change them to authentic texts. If you're using *GoogleClassroom* with your students, try using the 'InsertLearning' *GoogleChrome* extension, which lets you turn any website into a lesson by embedding questions and tasks right into it.	First of all, using the internet in online learning is a logical and expected step. Secondly, authentic materials help the students interact with a real language environment, which is motivating. Since *you* are choosing the materials, they are going to be more relevant and not outdated.
	Nominating several students in open class to answer the questions after reading or listening to a text	Set the chat settings to 'message host only' and collect answers from all the students. Run polls.	By doing this, you include all the students, which is not only engaging, but helps control their attention online.
	Putting events, paragraphs or pictures into the right order as a comprehension task	Design a *GoogleDoc* before class and, when you're ready, make enough copies of the document for each student (individual work) or each breakout room (pair-/groupwork), depending on what is more suitable in your case. The students complete the task individually or together by editing the *GoogleDoc*, while they can still hear you or each other on *Zoom*. With all the documents open, you can help each student or group and add written comments or hints. Since you can add personal comments (eg 'Well done, Anna, you've got everything right!'), there's no need to go through the answers in open class, but you can do that by nominating a student to share their screen. Avoid putting weaker students on the spot, though.	This way, the tasks become more interactive and appealing than just ticking the answers in a book with a pencil. It's not as elegant as designing an interactive task on a learning platform, but is a good start. On top of that, you can easily see everyone's answers in shared documents, as opposed to writing in a coursebook.

	Face-to-face element	Online element	How does it help online learning stand out?
Receptive skills	(Continued) Putting events, paragraphs or pictures into the right order as a comprehension task	If you're using a scanned or digital version of the coursebook, you won't have to retype much text: high-resolution screenshots of separate elements (sentences, paragraphs, pictures) work fine. (Alternative: create just one *GoogleDoc*, copy the same task to different pages and write the students' names as headings, so that they know who's where. In the end, the students can compare their answers by just scrolling through the document – but this also means that they can cheat during the task.)	This adaptation also works for other coursebook activities: text-based language presentations, etc. You might also be interested in checking what the digital version of your coursebook has to offer (this usually comes on a CD or via a product code). Even if it doesn't make all the exercises interactive, it might still be more convenient to use.
Language work	Vocabulary test–teach–test using pictures	Find a website that has pictures of the items you need to teach (eg food in a grocery store). Switch the language on the website to any language your students don't know (or use the *GoogleTranslate* extension to do this). Share the screen, tell your students that the website is 'broken' and they now need to 'repair' it by writing the correct word (in their personal notes or a *GoogleDoc* – you choose). You can then show them the original version of the website as feedback. Don't forget to focus on form and pronunciation, as necessary.	Apart from the activity being more fun, the students work with authentic lexis rather than made-up word lists.
	Vocabulary games	Create a class on *Quizlet* for your students and help them register. Create sets of flashcards as you teach new topics. You can write the 'terms' (new words) only, and ask your students to provide the definitions. Then use the different play modes to let the students compete with each other – they will be able to see the class results. This can be done as homework. You can also use *Kahoot!* (an online quiz tool). If you haven't tried it yet, there are guides available online. The premium version offers special online learning options, but you can work with the free version too. Help the students download the *Kahoot!* app onto their mobile phones. Project the screen with the pin code and questions on *Zoom*, while the students will be using their mobile app to answer.	Making your students responsible for working on their vocabulary flashcards allows for better learner autonomy.
	Controlled and semi-controlled practice tasks	These offer a lot of room for differentiation since the students can't see the original version of the task. Prepare a weak and a strong version of the same task in different *GoogleDocs*. For example, a weak version requires underlining the right form out of two, whereas in a strong version the student needs to put a verb from a box into the right place and the right form. The students can work individually or in breakout rooms, depending on what seems more appropriate. To keep fast finishers busy, you can easily type up an extra question or make fast finishers do that for each other.	You get a much better understanding of how each student is coping because you can see their answers. The students won't know that they've received simpler exercises unless you want them to, which can be face-saving in some situations. Fast finishers become easier to monitor and keep busy.
Productive skills	Speaking tasks: roleplays and simulations	Choose any website relevant to your topic. Student A works at the company; Student B is a customer. For example: **1** Student B is trying to order a pizza online but they can't. Using the given menu, they call Student A to make an order by phone. Student A has a list of the items which are not available today. **2** Student B has no internet access. They call Student A and ask them to book flight tickets using the provided destination, date, checked baggage weight and budget. Student A won't need a list of limitations as they will be using what the website offers.	The students interact while using real materials and aren't limited by simplified coursebook context. This is much closer to a real phone call.

	Face-to-face element	Online element	How does it help online learning stand out?
Productive skills	Other speaking tasks: problem-solving, debate, project, etc Writing tasks	No matter what the task is, with enough preparation time, the students can get much more creative when designing a poster or presentation together. Not all students can draw well, but with online tools this is not a problem, as they can use pictures they find online. You can also make them search the necessary information for a speaking task. Think about the genre and potential readers. What are your students most likely to write in English? Let them write emails to each other and answer them. They can CC you for error correction. Let them type up an imaginary CV in a neat *GoogleDoc* template and then go through everyone's work to find the best person to employ for a certain job. Use *Facebook* posts as a genre – it's up to you and your students if they want to actually post what they write and have other people comment on it. You can even create a private group for this. The more real the communicative purpose is, the better. For example, your students could write a post recommending what film to watch while the schools are shut down. Use *TripAdvisor* or any review website to write reviews (again, the first draft can be done in *GoogleDocs*).	The students become more motivated, as they can produce higher-quality work. The students type rather than write, which is already more realistic. The document is also neater, which makes them more motivated. Corrected mistakes become unnoticeable, which boosts their confidence before they share the final version. You can provide much more valuable feedback while the students are still writing, as they can't cover their work with an elbow! Use an error-correction code (eg *GR* for grammar) to save time when you're pinning a comment to a word or phrase. You can also check the students' work without their losing access to it, whereas in a face-to-face setting they hand in the paper.
Assessment	Giving your students a photocopied test	By designing a test using any survey tool (eg *GoogleForms* or *SurveyMonkey*), you can actually save time because it can be graded automatically and you can pre-program the feedback, ie provide an explanation in advance for why a certain answer is right, and leave a link to further activities if your students struggled with the question. You can even embed audio. If you're interested in reading what other opportunities online testing offers, please see my article 'Online testing' in *ETp* Issue 120.	Automatic grading is available and further information can be given under each question. Retyping the test from a coursebook is also an option, but it will take exactly the same amount of time, without giving you the above-mentioned benefits.

Some general advice

- If you're still relying on your coursebook tasks and face-to-face techniques, start slowly. Try incorporating one 'deeper-end' activity with each of your classes, reflect on it, then move on to the next one.
- Tasks first, tools second. Think what task your students need, then look for digital tools that can help it become more effective. Focusing on tools first can result in activities being fun but irrelevant.
- To keep your *GoogleDocs* organised if you're not yet using a learning platform, consider having at least one folder for each class on *GoogleDrive* and a folder for each lesson.
- When I know I'll be sharing *GoogleDocs* designed for different students, I keep a document with the lesson stages and a list of names and links, so that I can copy and paste the whole fragment into the chat window (eg *Name, Name, Name – https://...*). To avoid trouble, make sure the students have opened the link before you send them to the breakout rooms.
- Share your experience with colleagues, observe each other, and get training if possible – online teaching is different, and there are special courses available. ■

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Facing up to the virus

Julian Burnley carries on in the classroom.

The Covid-19 virus has led to the closure of many schools and private language institutions. In some countries, the schools have remained open, but have seen higher levels of student absence, students dropping out and fewer enrolments. Many schools and universities have moved face-to-face courses fully online.

This article offers ten tips for those still teaching in classrooms in places where Covid-19 cases have occurred.

1 Communicate with the students

Ask your managers or admin staff whether any communication about the virus has gone out to the students. Are they being told to wear masks or to wash their hands before entering the classroom? Remind the students in class of any instructions that have been issued. Also allow them to leave the classroom more often if they want to wash their hands regularly.

2 Be flexible

Some students will feel more comfortable staying away, so plan your lessons in a more flexible way: you may not know in advance how many will attend. Plan classes which can stand alone without a review stage – the students in your current class may not have attended the previous one. Include flexible stages in your lesson plan. For example, if the students finish a reading task early, get them to underline unknown words and to guess their meaning from context in pairs. Choose activities which allow discussion of the language in pairs and where you, as the teacher, can identify the gaps in student knowledge and then give support. As class sizes will be smaller, try to focus on topics and language that the students want to study.

3 Keep in touch

Consider what you can do for those students who don't want to attend class. Send a list of homework tasks and ask them to submit their work online. Keep them up to date with what has been covered in class. Send a list of useful study websites so you can keep them engaged during their absence.

4 Limit mingling activities

Limit mingling activities and group games, so the students will only have to work with one or two others, rather than nine or ten students, across a two-hour lesson. Students may feel anxious about having close contact with many different people in the class. Seat them so they are not working at the same table, and re-configure the seating arrangement so that pairs have some distance between each other.

5 Use conversational warmers

Your students may feel higher levels of anxiety than normal. Give them ten minutes at the beginning of class to chat freely in English. This allows them to confide in each other, get things off their chests, and ask for advice if needed. Interact with the students during this time, listen for important errors and exploit and upgrade useful language you hear from the students. For example, if you hear a useful word, write it on the board, mark the stress and write the parts of speech. You could also show examples of the word in collocations and write it in phonemic script.

6 Make yourself available

Be ready to talk to your students after class. They may want to solicit your advice or ask a question about something related to the pandemic. Recently, one of my students opened up after class about losing their job because of the outbreak. Another student approached one of my colleagues to talk about how stressful her current job is: she works in a hospital.

7 Be sensitive

Students may react if someone starts coughing or sneezing. If a student starts coughing a lot, approach them and see if they are OK. Ask if they would like some water. Try to defuse the situation, and be sensitive in terms of the questions you ask the whole class. The students may feel less willing to share with others the jobs they do. One of my students revealed to the class that she works as a flight attendant, which led to a few worried looks from the others.

8 Keep the students on-task

Covid-19 is the topic that students most want to discuss at the moment. A colleague found that when making suggestions in a speaking task, his students focused on suggestions about how to not catch the virus. Allowing your students to personalise the language and make it relevant to themselves is good, but if this happens across too many lessons with the same students, it can limit their ability to use language across different topics.

9 Get ready to upskill

The closure of schools has meant that many teachers have started to teach online, using such platforms as *Adobe Connect*, *Zoom* or *Skype*. If you are new to this, *YouTube* videos showing demo lessons can help. Teachers who are new to online teaching tell me that it feels more intense than classroom teaching, and you always need to be switched-on and focused.

10 Look after your mental health

You might find that *you* are feeling increased levels of anxiety. If you are forced to work from home, you may feel lonely. Talk to your line manager about the systems that are in place at your school. There may be employee assistance programmes, or it might help to have regular meetings with your line manager. See whether your school uses *Zoom*, *Teams* or *Skype*, so that you can keep in touch with your colleagues remotely.

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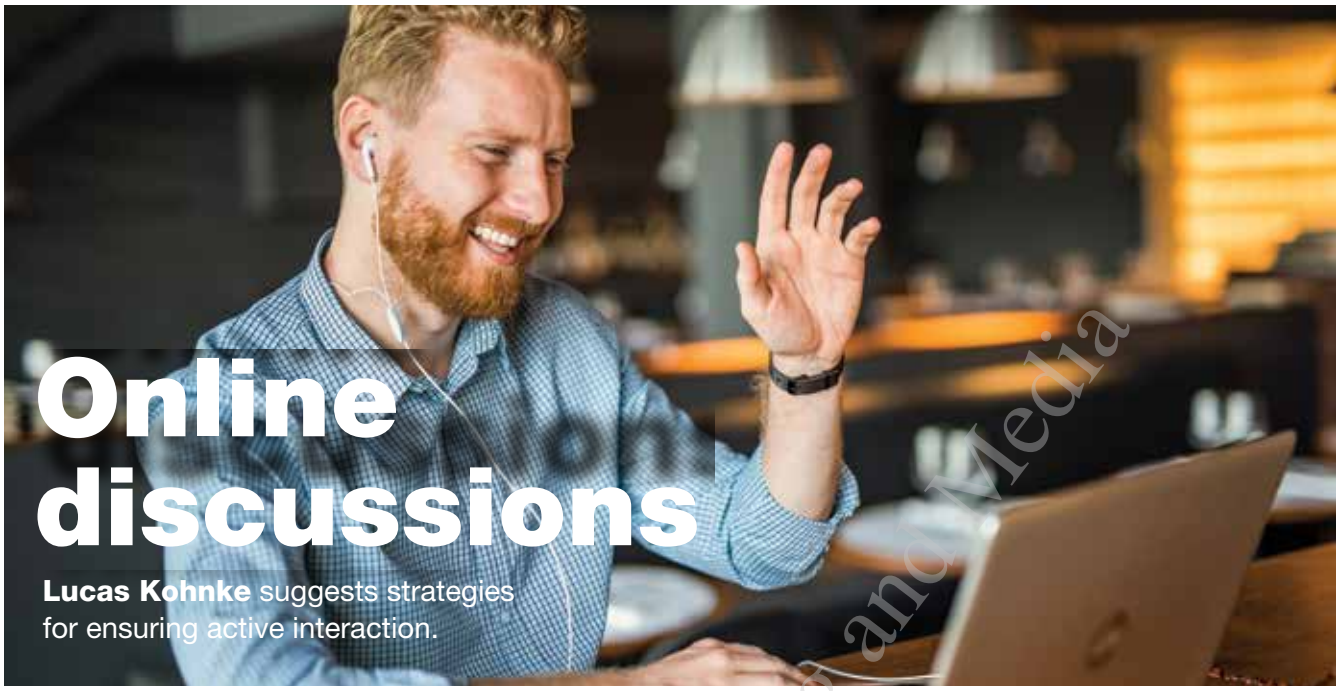

Online discussions

Lucas Kohnke suggests strategies for ensuring active interaction.

We generally expect our students to do a portion of their language learning outside the classroom – even more so in the current Covid-19 crisis. This expectation often involves some element of online or blended learning, consisting of videos, podcasts, apps and discussions. An increasing number of attractive and modern learning apps and platforms are available, which the students can use to practise listening, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. However, as teachers, we often struggle with how to adapt available online materials to make learning active and interactive for our students.

Two favourite *classroom* activities are discussions and debates. Unfortunately, when we transfer these to an *online* environment, the experience often degenerates into an endless number of written posts that the students have to work through, and an absence of active interaction between the participants.

Another disadvantage of both face-to-face and online discussion and debate is that these learning mechanisms often lead to tensions amongst the students, who sometimes don't understand how to engage in polite and respectful dialogue.

This article introduces interactive and practical strategies for motivating students to participate effectively in online discussions.

Engaging discussions

Discussion is a necessary component of learning, requiring the students to make meaning out of content and contextualise that meaning among a social group. Specifically, discussions require the students to do the following:

- Articulate what they are learning;
- Actively participate in meaning-making;
- Generate social interactions.

Students usually want to engage with others online, but they can find it challenging to keep the discussion and social interaction going.

Before you start an online discussion, it is a good idea to spark the students' imagination and get them to organise their ideas using mind maps. There are several apps and websites available to help them do this, and I found the following tools work very well for helping the students to order their ideas, expand on the topic and keep the discussion going: Lino (*https://en.linoit.com*), Miro (*https://miro.com*), Mural (*https://mural.co/*), and Venngage (*https://venngage.com/*).

Active discussions

To create active online spaces that engage our students in online discussion forums, we can incorporate a variety of interactions. These interactions include *personal interaction* (eg posting images of yourself), *factual interaction* (eg posting information about a famous person), *creative interaction* (eg collaborative story writing), *critical interaction* (eg debating), and *imaginary interaction* (eg roleplaying, rewriting stories). Below are three ideas that can get you thinking about how you can incorporate discussions with your learners into an online environment:

1 Media-rich discussions: Images, audio and video can all stimulate discussions and increase student engagement. Instead of having the students post and reply to each other's posts in writing, get them to use media to make the discussion more personal. For example, ask each student to record a short presentation using their smartphone, and then ask the others to comment on the presentations by posting audio-only responses. I have noticed that students tend to be camera shy. When you first introduce this activity, allow them to record their voices only. You might also want to divide the students into small groups, so that they feel more comfortable sharing their recordings.

2 Roleplay and debates as discussions: Roleplay can get your students thinking more critically about a topic. Instead of having the students simply write a response to a question, get them to consider a different perspective. I have found that assigning the students different roles (eg oil baron or oil company), and then asking them to respond as if they were that person or company, produces engaging responses. In a follow-up activity, put the students into two groups and turn the forum into a debate between the two sides, thereby creating lively discussions. This activity provides a fruitful opportunity for the students to practise engaging in respectful and intelligent debate. I have found that having clear guidelines is helpful in guiding them towards well-developed responses.

3 Student-led discussions: These give the students the control of and responsibility for a discussion. Let your *students* choose the topic they want to discuss, or allow them to moderate the discussion by assigning a student to be a discussion leader each week or for a particular topic. Remind your students to engage in respectful discussion by setting clear guidelines, so they know what you expect from them.

Handling discussions

Students expect us to read and comment on their discussions. However, it can be difficult to strike a balance between too much and too little feedback without dominating and skewing the discussion. I have found that it is essential to acknowledge some of the early posts with a comment such as *Thanks, Adam, for getting us started this week*, or *Linda, that's a great idea. How does it relate to Adam's idea?* so the students know we have a presence and we recognise that they are sharing great ideas. As the discussion comes to an end, we need to wrap up everyone's thinking, acknowledge the ideas generated, and perhaps provide a lead-in to the next learning experience.

This requirement can be quite time-consuming if we have to do it for individual comments. One useful approach is to recap the main points of an ongoing discussion. Finally, give a general overview of the main points of the finished discussion. This technique provides excellent opportunities for positive reinforcement, increased interaction and enhanced engagement between the students themselves and between the teacher and the student(s).

Weaving

Often when our students discuss a topic, the threads can become very long and, eventually, unfocused. So, one idea is to use a 'weaving strategy' to bring the discussion back to the main idea, so that it can move forward. As teachers, we aim to develop our learners' critical thinking skills by showing the relationship between the students' thoughts and ideas, and their relevance.

Weaving a discussion thread can be very time-consuming and challenging. To make a good weave, start by reviewing all the student posts, look for similarities and differences, inconsistencies or unanswered questions. Then, synthesise the main ideas, acknowledge who said what using direct quotes and names (*Thomas, that's a really good idea*), then ask the students to focus on a specific area by asking explicit questions for the rest of the discussion (*What don't we know about X, Y and Z, and how might knowing these things help us consider this issue another way?*). I have found it to be beneficial to include an interesting title to re-spark the students' interest and engagement in the discussion when I weave. Depending on your aim for the discussion, you can either weave once a week or twice a week.

Summarising

Another strategy is to summarise the main points of a discussion, as most students will probably not read all of their classmates' posts. This action helps your students to see all of the thread's main points when the discussion has come to an end. Similar to weaving, we highlight every main point and acknowledge who made that point. However, the main difference between weaves and summaries is that we are signalling the end of the discussion.

This activity reinforces three critical learning behaviours. First, the students learn that we attribute key points to the originator. Second, we summarise the material so that we can explain different ideas. Third, we connect ideas from the online discussion to the in-class discussion or the rest of the course.

I suggest you do not end a summary with a question, as a question would not bring closure to the discussion. Alternatively, as summarising is a more natural skill to use than weaving, you might want to assign a student to summarise the discussion.

Managing expectations

Finally, inform your students when you intend to read and comment on the discussions. It is a good idea to be explicit about when you plan to join or read the forums, so that the students know when to expect your appearance and what to expect from your observations. For example, you could say *I'll join the discussion forums every Tuesday and Thursday* or *I'll read and comment on your contributions on Friday at 5 pm*. Let your students know what to expect!

♦ ♦ ♦

In this article, I have introduced a few ideas to get you started thinking about how you can incorporate motivating and engaging online discussions into your classes. Online discussions can feel lonely, so keep the social engagement moving to encourage your students to participate actively in the learning process. The strategies presented will not only motivate your students to discuss the material actively but keep them coming back for more. ■

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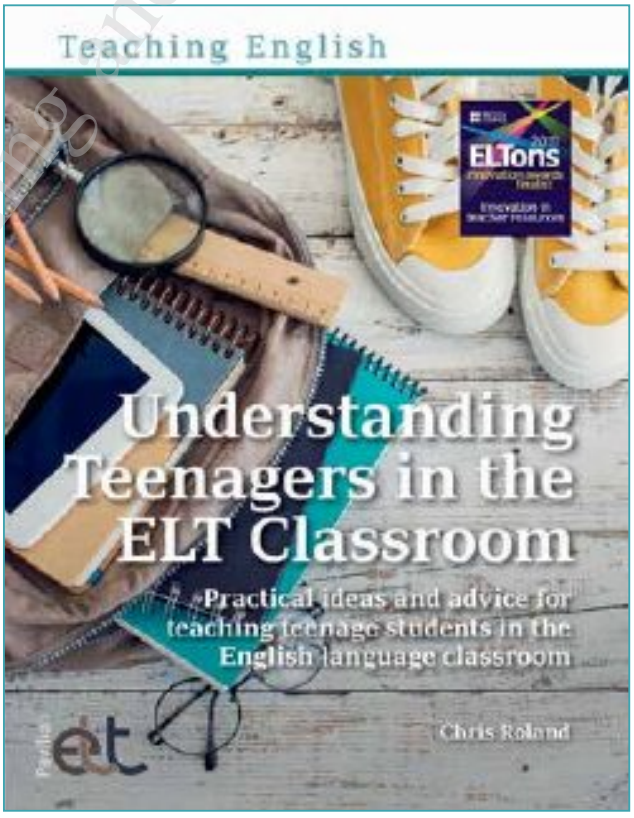
Chris Roland



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Go NUTS!

Roxy Lee and **Stewart Gray** present a basic formula for designing creative activities.

Students of all ages enjoy being creative, and doing so in English may help them develop flexibility in their language use. However, as many teachers are required to follow a pre-determined curriculum, it can be difficult to find time and space for creativity in the classroom without deviating from the language that must be learnt. As an aid to educators, we offer this formula for designing creative English activities: Go NUTS! Or, in other words, creative activities are those in which students create **N**ew and **U**seful things **T**ogether, while the teacher gives **S**upport. We came up with this formula while teaching elementary-school-age students in South Korea, and the activities mentioned below are a sample of those we have experimented with while developing the formula.

New

Naturally, for students to be creative, they have to be making something *new*. Fortunately, this is a capacity that all students already have. However, for an English teacher who must follow a set curriculum, not just *anything* 'new' will do. The students' creative expression must relate to the target materials.

To satisfy this, teachers can have their students create things using the curricular contents as input. Once the students have practised the target language, teachers can instruct them to play with the class materials in new ways: to *extend* the material, and to *recontextualise* it.

To *extend* materials, students need to be given the chance to go beyond them. A classic example of an extending activity is 'What happened next?'. In this activity, students reading a storybook are instructed to create a scene to follow the book's original ending by drawing a picture, making a comic strip or writing it out, depending on their language level.

'A Rainbow Day' (at the bottom of this page) is a fifth-grade student's comic strip – as per the teacher's instructions, S1–S3 are a summary of the storybook the student was reading, while S4–S6 are the student's own, extended story.

To *recontextualise* materials, students need to transpose them from their original setting to a different one. For instance, when teaching a textbook unit on the present simple tense entitled 'What do you do on weekends?', a teacher might ask the students not only to write out their routine as it is, but also to imagine the routine of a fictional character, or of themselves but ten years in the future.

However you go about it, the aim when designing activities is to provide a linguistic and creative starting point for the students and a goal that is open-ended enough to allow them to create new and unexpected things. Ideally, the students will use the *target language* when creating things, but they need not be limited to this. Because of the nature of open-ended activities, the students will be quite likely to ask for and use language *beyond* the curriculum. With this in mind, it is important at the design stage to consider how to scaffold a student's creative expression through English.

'New' summary:

- Students can express themselves creatively using curricular materials as input.
- By extending and recontextualising class materials, students can make new things.

Useful

To be considered creative, a product must be not only new but also *useful*, or *valuable*. This makes intuitive sense: a laptop made of pasta may be an entirely new concept, but it is unlikely to be considered a success because of its uselessness.

This is true in education as well. In simple terms, if the new things that the students create have a good effect – if they serve the goals of the teacher, the students and/or curriculum – then they are *useful* as well as new. This good effect can be anything, including making the students happy or motivated, but may also be directly related to the curriculum.

For instance, if the curriculum requires the students to practise certain vocabulary items, the teacher might instruct them to create a board game involving this vocabulary, which their peers will then play. Another option would be to have the students write a script with the vocabulary. They can then perform this script for the rest of the class.

Opposite is a 3D map made by sixth-graders. For *newness*, the map activity's context was 'a city in the future'. For *usefulness*, the students presented their map in class using *there is/are* ... and other target language.

In activities like these, not only does the curriculum provide input for new creations, but those creations serve the curriculum. The students can practise language when they *create*, and also when *using* (playing, watching) the thing that was created. This illustrates the point that as long as creative goals are aligned with curricular goals, creative activities can potentially fit within an existing curriculum. Getting students to 'use' their creations as classroom activities can help a lot in this regard.

'Useful' summary:

- Creations that have a helpful effect for the teacher and/or the students are 'useful'.
- Match creative goals to educational/curricular goals for maximum usefulness.

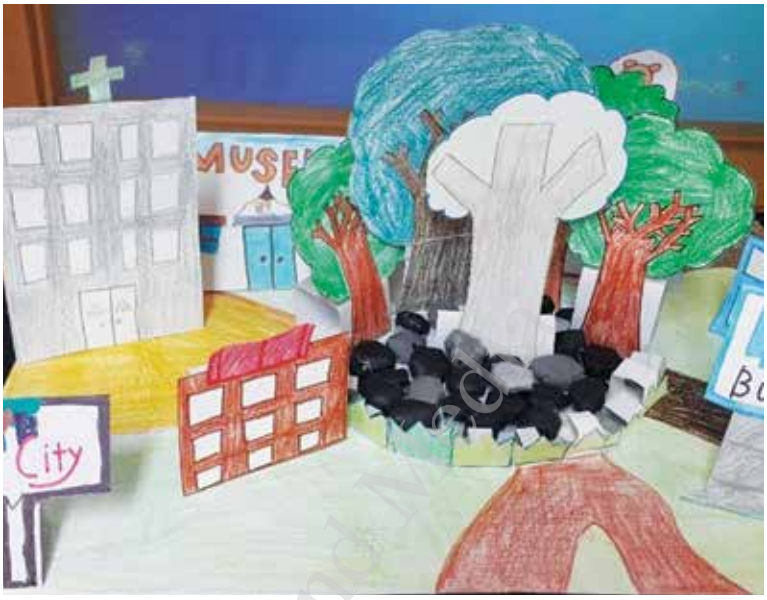
Together

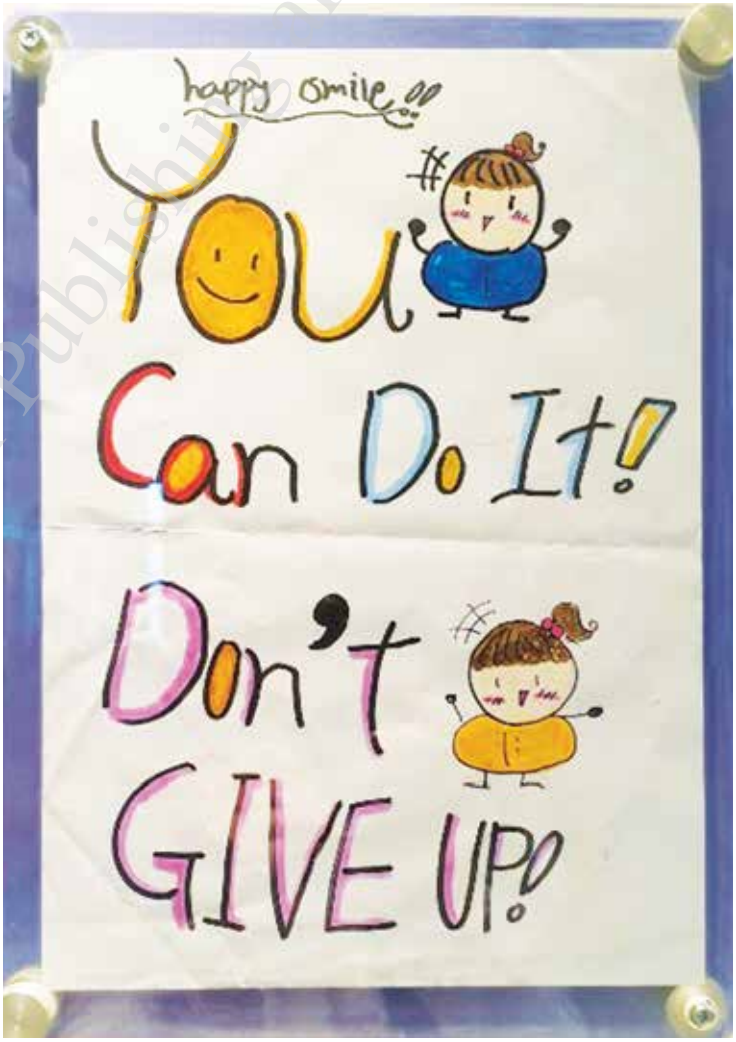
While 'new' and 'useful' describe the sorts of things students can create, to encourage them to produce such things it is often good to have them work *together*: to collaborate on their creations and share what they come up with publicly, as opposed to working alone and keeping everything private. There are two main reasons for this.

Firstly, collaboration allows the students to share their ideas and skills. They may be more likely to come up with something new if they are able to pool their insights and negotiate their ideas. If this negotiation can be done even *partially* in English, it may also be useful language practice in itself.

Moreover, quite apart from the fact that many brilliant creative activities, such as roleplays, cannot be done by individual students, creative activities also tend to involve diverse skills. For example, comic strips require story writing, art and general language skills. Of course, not all students are equally comfortable with all the skills needed, and particularly in EFL/ESL classes there may be those who struggle with English while excelling at other things. When students collaborate, those more comfortable with English can work with those skilled in art, singing, acting, video editing, etc, to produce the best creative outcomes together.

Secondly, sharing things publicly can motivate creativity. The case can be made that today's young





A motivational poster made by a student, displayed on the classroom wall to be seen by next year's students.

learners, the social media generation, *expect* to share the things they create. And, indeed, it is our experience that groups of young students preparing material they know will be shared with the class often invest a lot of effort to make that material entertaining. We have even had students plead with us to show their video projects to their friends or to hang their posters on the classroom wall. Experiences like this have taught us the value of setting aside time and space to share what our students have made, to honour the effort they have put in. And as a bonus, sharing the students' creations with the class provides language input for other students, thus making the creations more pedagogically useful.

Of course, when it comes to student collaboration and sharing, there are risks. It is always possible that one student in a group will dominate the creative process, while others are left out. It is also possible that the students will *not* be happy to share what they create. For this reason, 'Together' is not an *absolute* principle in the Go NUTS! formula. Instead, it is something for teachers to bear in mind when designing creative activities: whether or not – and if so, how – to get the students working together and sharing their creations.

'Together' summary:

- Collaboration allows the students to pool their ideas and skills.
- Sharing can be motivating, and shared creations can be useful as language input for others.

Support

We come, at last, to the teacher's role in this creativity formula: providing *support*. Naturally, a big part of this may simply be taking the N, U and T parts of the formula into account when designing activities. Teachers can provide students with the language input they need for their creative expression, and with open-ended activities, so that they can create new and useful things together – this is an essential form of support. Beyond that, however, there are some other important considerations for teachers.

One of the most important things a teacher can do is to establish the *expectation* of creativity in class. It has often been said that creativity is incompatible with a standardised, correct-answer-focused educational environment – and it is reasonable to expect that students will offer 'correct' answers rather than creative ones if they believe that is what they are supposed to do.

One of the most effective strategies we have found to nudge our students towards creative expression is telling them outright what it means for a creation to be new and useful: 'The roleplay script should include today's vocabulary *and* be as funny as possible', or 'Make a poster that is *different from* everyone else's'. We have found that giving the students a clear notion of what good creative work is can help them to do such work themselves.

Furthermore, we would like to recommend that feedback on the students' creations be encouraging. Even after offering a great deal of guidance, we have had plenty of students produce work that was far removed from what we had hoped. In such cases, our preferred response has been to praise whatever is praiseworthy in the students' creations, to avoid discouragement. All students have the potential to be creative, and it is of critical importance that teachers show their students that they believe in them.

Meanwhile, when constructive feedback is given, it is good if that feedback is targeted to help the students produce more new and useful creations next time. We have found it is often helpful to get the students to self-assess their work in these situations. They can be instructed to reflect on how well they think their creation came out, whether they used all the target language when producing it, whether it was well-received by their peers, and any number of other things. The key point is that, whether self, peer or teacher feedback is given, the feedback should draw the students' attention to the creative and pedagogical goals of the activity so that, next time, their creative work can be informed by those goals, and therefore be more likely to satisfy them.

'Support' summary:

- Give the students open-ended activities and the language input they need for those activities.
- Establish the expectation that the students will be creative, not just that they will produce a correct answer.
- Give feedback on creations that a) encourages the students and b) helps them to produce more new and useful things next time.

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The young learners' English classroom can be a brilliant place for all kinds of creativity, from poetry to video projects. In terms of activities, the sky's the limit! However, incorporating creativity into English classes *appropriately* requires a lot of thinking and design on the part of the teacher. In the hope of facilitating this, we offer this advice: Have your students make **N**ew and **U**seful things **T**ogether, with **S**upport from you, the teacher. In our experience, young students will be creative in English class in all kinds of ways, so long as they are encouraged to be so. ■

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The importance of creativity

Paul Drury recognises and reinforces the need for creativity in the YL classroom.

Back in 2006, Ken Robinson gave a TED talk that is now famous. In it, he asks that creativity and literacy be respected as equally important. He decries the fact that our one-size-fits-all education system is producing students who have fallen out of love with learning, and who are made to feel failures because they do not perform well under standardised testing systems. Most powerfully, he believes that children's innate creativity is not valued in our industrialised school systems. And yet, it is the learners' willingness to experiment, to make mistakes and to learn from them that characterises the skills they will need in a confused and fast-changing future.

We are, therefore, faced with a challenge. If children's creativity is innate but undervalued, and if levels of creativity are dropping during primary schooling, surely we need to explore what part we, as teachers, play in this process. What are we doing that is *nurturing* creativity and what are we doing that is potentially *harming* it?

What is creativity?

A subject as vast and controversial as creativity is not easy to define. However, the report entitled 'All our futures', commissioned by the UK government, defined it as *'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value'.* Broadly speaking, this definition is in line with the consensus among researchers that creativity is about *using* your brain to have *ideas* that are *new* and of *value*.

Why is creativity important?

Industry leaders tell us that the jobs our children will do don't yet exist. The World Economic Forum considers creativity to be one of the most important skills needed in the workplace, and it is interesting to read what the OECD 2019 report, 'Fostering students' creativity and critical thinking', has to say on the subject (my emphasis):

'*… given the digitalisation of society, with artificial intelligence and robotics possibly leading to automation prospects for a sizeable share of the economy,* ***skills that are less easy to automate, such as creativity and critical thinking, become more valued****. But even if there was no economic argument,* ***creativity and critical thinking contribute to human well-being*** *and to the good functioning of democratic societies.*'

(The report considers both creativity and critical thinking, and draws some very useful parallels.)

Creativity is innate

Teachers who work with children know that young minds are fizzing with creativity. Their exuberance for life means they crave stimulation and learning. They spend large parts of the day engaged in some form of play. They know how to experiment and how to work within constraints. They understand how to break the rules when necessary. They also have the advantage that their thinking has not been restricted by the imposition of societal norms and institutionalisation. They are able to deal with duality: they have no fear of mixing reality with fiction, ambiguity is all around them. Very young learners are especially talented at constructing meaning, using a variety of linguistic, paralinguistic and environmental clues. To put it very bluntly, creativity is innate in children.

The sad reality is that levels of creativity reduce frighteningly quickly as we get older. Research carried out by George Land suggests that divergent thinking (a key aspect of creativity) can drop by as much as 68 percent between the ages of five and ten. (I recommend you watch his TEDx talk entitled 'The failure of success'.)

Losing creativity

Why do we become less creative as we get older? The answer is not straightforward, but there are a couple of factors worth highlighting.

Firstly, we start to apply rules to the world around us. For example, we learn that a crayon is to be used on paper, not on the walls. We also learn that that same crayon is not food and doesn't go in our mouth. As young children, every day is filled with new learning and we assimilate this learning as rules and conventions. These rules are important because of a neurological fact: the brain consumes a lot of energy. The brain therefore does everything within its power to increase efficiency. (There's a suggestion that chess grandmasters can use 6,000 calories in a day, whilst sitting, playing chess.) From the brain's perspective, the best way to conserve energy is to accept conventions, to use cliché, to give the easiest, quickest answer. This is in direct opposition to what creativity needs: it requires the brain to work, to challenge concepts, to explore ideas from every angle. This can be both challenging and time-consuming.

Secondly, and this is a little more contentious, what teachers are, or are not, doing in the classroom could be damaging the children's creativity. We have a lot of contact with young learners and so need to be more aware of the things we do which can both nurture and kill creativity. This is the focus of the next section of the article.

Nurturing creativity

Here are eight techniques to nurture creativity:

1 Praise effort more, praise ability less.

Research carried out by Carol Dweck presented two groups of learners with a difficult challenge. One group was praised for the *effort* they showed, the other was praised for their *ability*, ie they were told how intelligent they were. Both groups were then presented with an even harder follow-up challenge. Ninety percent of the students in the first group were keen to try the follow-up, whereas the majority of children in the second group became frustrated and gave up. This indicates that children who are praised for *the way* they work are more likely to perservere and work harder to find a solution. Praising effort will increase the chances our learners will persevere in the face of adversity and will see the value of good old-fashioned hard work. Remember, creativity is not easy, it requires focus and effort.

2 Provide the learners with time to focus.

It has become something of a cliché to say that our world is characterised by distraction and lack of focus. For this reason, whenever possible, try activities that are not time-bound and activities where the learners are doing one single thing. For example, don't feel guilty about asking children just to colour something in. Time spent colouring allows the brain to process learning and recharge. Remember, multitasking does not exist. It just means that we do two things less well.

3 Push harder.

As I mentioned above, the brain is always looking for shortcuts. If learners are able to produce 'just enough', they won't look further or push harder. Creativity is to be found when we move past cliché and learn to see the world in a new light. As Ken Robinson says in his book *Creative Schools*, one of the dangers learners face is not being sufficiently challenged: '*Low achievement can lead to low expectations, which can have a debilitating effect on a student's entire school career.*' For this reason, make sure you are always ready with follow-up questions. Always ask your learners to explain their answers. In short, keep them on their toes!

4 Embrace ambiguity.

Children are surrounded by ambiguity: life is ambiguous, learning a language is a particularly ambiguous process, so why do we insist on things being black or white, A or B? It is in the *search* for an answer, when we explore ideas and evaluate options, that learning happens. And yet, we spend much of our time jumping over these muddy waters to find a nice clean straight path. I strongly encourage you to allow space for a little uncertainty in the classroom. When asking a question, hold back the answer for longer than is comfortable. Push more responsibility onto the learners. Ask them to explain, to justify their answers. Ask the rest of the class if they agree. For some key answers, you may want to hold back the answer until the next lesson. The purpose is not to frustrate the learners (though it will do so at first) but to encourage them to rely more on their own judgement, to activate their brains to find more evidence.

5 Generate questions.

Consider allowing time in every class for the children to create a list of questions related to the lesson topic. The focus is on *quantity* not *quality*. As a follow-up, they can go through and select their top three questions or ideas. Challenge your learners to think of three 'serious' questions and three 'silly' questions. It's vital that, during the creative thinking process, no idea is dismissed too soon. The neurologist Beau Lotto, among others, makes it clear that there is no such thing as flashes of inspiration; it's simply that we do not see the thought process that takes us from A to B. For this reason, every idea is valid until the time is right to evaluate those put forward.

6 Explore different points of view.

It's a tried and tested technique of creative thinking to view a problem from every angle. If you're looking at a picture, ask the learners about what is *not* in the picture. For example: *Who took the picture? What is happening on either side of the picture? What are the people looking at?* etc.

7 Play along.

Playfulness is the single most important requirement in creative thinking. This is the disposition that empowers learners to experiment and, most importantly, make mistakes. When you see that children are playing with ideas and words, making jokes and asking questions, these are all signs of playfulness. As such, these are the moments when you should consider joining in and playing along. In any good piece of jazz, the musicians feed off each other to create something greater than the sum of its parts. So it is with creative thinking, where one idea leads to another … but may lead nowhere.

8 Make your classroom a safe space.

The easiest way to crush creativity is by not acknowledging – or by rejecting – the creative efforts of your learners. Imagine a three year old who has just spent ten minutes (a lifetime at that age) drawing a picture just for you. They proudly present you with the picture and say: *This is for you*. I assume your reaction would not be: *Good grief. That's hideous!* And yet, how often do we inadvertently suppress creative thought? We all do it, but take special care about using phrases such as: *Not now. Sit down and be quiet. No, that's not right*. We can never be sure what impact our words will have; we never know which of our words spoken in haste or frustration could harm our learners' confidence. I'm sure we can all think of an occasion in our own childhood when a teacher, perhaps inadvertently, said something hurtful.

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I have argued that levels of creativity drop during the primary years, and made some suggestions on what we, as educators, can do to protect and nurture creativity. However, I would like to end by emphasising why creativity is important to us on a *human* level. To be engaged in creative thinking requires focus, it requires the brain to be engaged. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written a lot on the nature of happiness and creativity, and famously said:

'*… flow – the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it*.'

I would argue that engaging in creative thinking can be a way of achieving this flow state and, when we enter a flow state, we are, to put it at its simplest, 'happy'.

If you'd like to find out more, feel free to get in touch with me at the email address below or visit my website: *www.nurturingcreativity.org*. ■

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Service, please! 1

Martina Dorn serves up a memorable metaphor for formative assessment.

In this first part of a two-part article, I would like to use a soup-cooking analogy to highlight the subtle, frequently-overlooked, but important role of formative assessment in the process of teaching and learning. The second part of the article, which includes practical activities for implementing formative assessment, will appear in the next issue of *ETp*.

Formative assessment

When I talk to colleagues, superiors, teacher trainees, parents or students regarding formative assessment, rather than agonising over countless definitions, I conceptualise it with a single metaphor. There are two popular metaphors (cited by a number of authors) to choose from:

1. *'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.'*
2. *'Formative assessment occurs when you go to the doctor for a physical examination, whereas summative assessment occurs when you get an autopsy.'*

I prefer the first, because it naturally lends itself to pleasant mental images and associations. The second is somewhat morbid, and thus uninspiring. After all, who relishes a visit to a doctor, let alone a trip to the morgue? The first, I believe, is the perfect analogy for teaching and learning, with formative assessment being an integral part of the entire process.

Assessment *for* Learning (AfL): An ongoing process which informs both teachers and students of the extent of the students' understanding. It is supposed to be motivating, and to improve both the students' learning and the teacher's teaching.

AfL strategies vary in their degree of formality. For example: hand signals, open-ended questions, 'think–pair–share' and peer assessment.

Assessment *as* Learning (AaL): This takes place when the students monitor and reflect on their own learning and consider what they know and can do, and how to use assessment to make adjustments for new and/or deeper learning.

AaL strategies include self-assessment, questionnaires, journal keeping and goal setting.

Assessment *of* Learning (AoL): This occurs at defined key points during a course of study or at the end of a unit, semester or academic year. It assesses achievement against outcomes and standards.

Some examples of AoL strategies are tests, projects, presentations and practical demonstrations.

The ingredients

Formative assessment is a concept that many mainstream educational institutions insist on, and many individual practitioners sign up to. Unfortunately, many fail to maximise its potential. In ELT, formative assessment often remains unaddressed on teacher training courses or is perceived solely in terms of giving feedback to students. I am a strong proponent of formative assessment – with its Assessment *for* Learning (AfL) and Assessment *as* Learning (AaL) strategies (see the box on this page). I also believe there is a lot that can be done to embed formative assessment effectively in everyday practice. After all, should we not ensure that our students are supported in their quest to learn, improve and, through the process, become autonomous and life-long learners?

The term *formative assessment* was coined by Michael Scriven in 1967 and came to prominence in the UK in the 1990s after the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) was formed. It was subsequently popularised by Dylan William and Paul Black who, funded by the ARG, undertook a literature review on the use of assessment to help with learning. That led to the publication of three influential works: *Inside the Black Box, Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box* and *Working Inside the Black Box*. Since then, formative assessment has been considered a crucial ingredient in teachers' efforts to encourage their students to understand the goals to be achieved, to identify their current level of performance, and then assist them in closing the gap.

The kitchen

People cook in various places – in a corner of a small apartment, a cosy country cottage with an old-fashioned stove, a spacious modern house, or a commercial kitchen in a restaurant or hotel.

Likewise, there are different settings for teaching and learning: mainstream schools or language schools (perhaps involving a homestay), training centres, colleges and universities. In addition, there are different environments, including classrooms, study rooms, language labs, lecture theatres – even coffee shops, libraries and bedrooms. They all serve a common purpose – for students to gain understanding and achieve their academic, professional and even personal goals through the process of learning.

The head chef

With all their knowledge, training and experience, head chefs have authority in their kitchens. They set them up, organise everything and manage them efficiently. Without head chefs, there would be chaos.

Likewise, *teachers* are the experts as far as the facilitation of learning is concerned, and are in control of the learning environment and process. They possess the relevant subject knowledge, teacher training and experience (of varying degrees, but nonetheless invaluable).

The team

However, head chefs do not work alone. They require teams of, for example, commis, sous and sauté chefs, meat and vegetable cooks, amongst others, all of whom have a range of skills and work collaboratively. Head chefs give the team guidance, and equip them with useful and widely applicable skills for use immediately and in the future. After all, cooking any dish, not just soup, is not a one-off.

Likewise, in the classroom, the *students* work with the teacher, learn and acquire skills by completing various tasks, and either choose or are assigned different roles in them. The teachers manage the entire process and attempt to shape the students' behaviour, enabling them to be prepared for the future.

The menu

In the kitchen, the menu is carefully created, matching the culinary philosophy of individual establishments. Some menus are standardised and set by the head office, others are tailored to their patrons' specific requirements and preferences. In addition, most head chefs have their own recipe books, full of tried and tested recipes.

Likewise, teachers either follow a curriculum prescribed by educational authorities or mother institutions, or they design their own and base them on the needs and wants of their students. Like head chefs, teachers have their favourite lessons and activities, which they know are effective and which the students enjoy, though they are not always delivered in identical ways.

The utensils

All head chefs and their teams need well-equipped kitchens. Certain items, such as large and small appliances, pots and pans and utensils such as knives, ladles and spatulas, are essential. Then there are other tools, like a corn stripper, pasta measurer or egg separator, which are very effective but less known and usually under-used.

Likewise, teachers have different types of hardware, software, devices and even furniture at their disposal to ensure that learning takes place. When used skilfully, any given tool, however high- or low-tech, can facilitate understanding and acquisition of skills. Furthermore, when combined with formative assessment and its AfL strategies – the under-utilised and, dare I say, neglected tools – the results are likely to be spectacular. Most teaching and learning tasks can be greatly enhanced if complemented with AfL strategies – especially checking the students' perception of their own understanding.

The condiments

Apart from the main ingredients and common condiments listed in the recipes, head chefs add a range of herbs and spices to enhance the flavour and make their dishes unique. The kitchen team observe, taste and evaluate, and are subsequently told to experiment with various condiments and their quantities, and even come up with new combinations.

Likewise, in teaching and learning, formative assessment with its AaL strategies mirrors the addition of spices and other condiments. First, teachers suggest ways in which the students could improve their performance and encourage them to try out new ideas. Subsequently, the students are motivated to self-assess, reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies, and identify what action is required to attain better results. A certain combination of AaL strategies, and how frequently and intensely they are applied, is person specific, and each student needs to discover what works for them.

The tasting

A soup is eventually served to the patrons, who taste it and thus evaluate its quality. On rare occasions, there may even be food critics amongst the customers, and their reviews could make or break the restaurant.

Likewise, at the end of a course of study, Assessment *of* Learning (AoL) takes place, when, by means of summative assessment tools, such as tests, the students' knowledge is formally ascertained. The results are subsequently used by a range of stakeholders for various reasons – end-of-year grades, college and university entry, school ranking, etc.

As can be seen in the analogy above, the AfL and AaL strategies of formative assessment do not, and should not, exist in isolation, nor should they be left out. When employed consistently and embedded firmly in the teaching and learning process, they can make a profound difference to the students' direct involvement, which can lead to greater learner empowerment, independence and self-regulation. As teaching practitioners, we owe it to our students to facilitate this. All it usually takes is making some adjustments to what we do before, during and after our teaching and learning activities, and to how we exploit the opportunities for conducting feedback. ■

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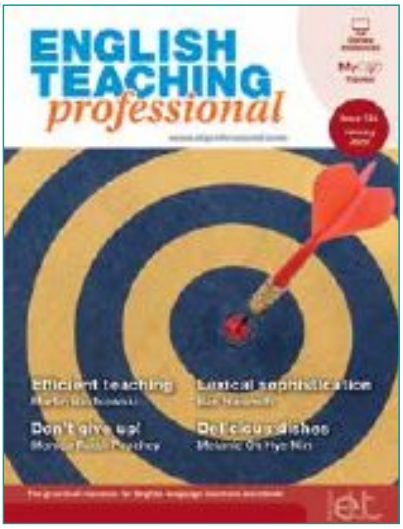

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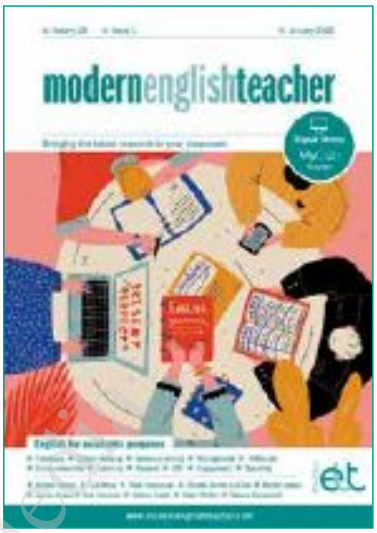

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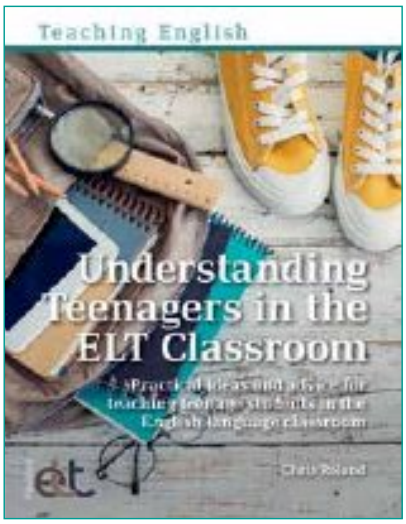
I've heard of a new teaching technique or method I'd like to try, but I'm not sure where to begin… I don't have much time to search the internet so I really need easy-to-digest information with suggestions of classroom application in one place.



The *Teaching English* series is here to help you bring methodology to your classroom. Each handbook focuses on a different aspect of teaching, from blended learning to teaching one-to-one classes to teaching specific age groups. Addressing both the theory and practice, these titles will give you a detailed grounding in not just the *what* and *why* of a new-to-you teaching approach, but also the *how* – supporting you with practical tips and ideas for applying it.

Students' stories 18

David Heathfield tells a tale of two legs – or possibly one.

Edoardo Gabai, an Italian student, rehearsed and then told his classmates this comic tale from *The Decameron*, a 14th-century collection of tales by Giovanni Boccaccio. (Interestingly, Boccaccio presents the tales as being told by a group of ten young Florentines trying to pass the time while they are isolating themselves to avoid catching the plague.) It was evident in Edoardo's highly entertaining and exuberant performance that he wanted more than anything to share his cultural heritage with the other students. They reciprocated by sharing stories from their own heritages, which put intercultural giving and receiving at the very heart of their learning.

'Chichibìo and the crane'

Storytelling tip: Freeze

One of the simplest and most powerful drama techniques to use after telling a story involves getting the students to use their bodies to make still and silent images representing a moment frozen in time. These 'freeze' images are usually most effective when they are heightened to emphasise character, emotion and action. Making a freeze means the students can explore dramatic moments in a story from the perspectives of the different characters. A simple freeze can be made by an individual student, but when two or more students together make a freeze of characters relating to each other, the relationship between them can produce a more complex and interesting image to explore.

The students can be invited to show and compare their freeze images. A freeze can also be a starting point for a piece of drama improvisation.

Before telling

Get the students to talk about the different species of birds which are typically eaten in the cultures they know about. Find out if anyone has ever heard of eating crane meat, and show an image of a crane.

Invite the students to listen to you telling 'Chichibìo and the crane', and get them to learn the names of the three characters: Currado the master, Chichibìo the cook and Brunetta the neighbour. Tell them that they are going to perform the story afterwards.

While telling

Because this is a short comic tale, be sure to make the three main characters distinct from one another by playfully accentuating their postures, mannerisms and voices.

After telling

Ask the students to make different freeze images from the story. Here is a script you can follow or adapt:

1 *Stand up facing a partner and show me a 'freeze', a still image of Currado giving the crane he killed to his cook, Chichibìo. You can mime holding the bird – you don't need anything in your hands. Remember to show that Currado thinks he is much more important than his servant, Chichibìo … 3–2–1 Freeze! Now relax.*

When we do a 'freeze' we are telling a moment from the story with our bodies and faces. You're going to do that freeze again, but make it clearer and stronger. Use your knees, your shoulders, your hands, your eyes … 3–2–1 Freeze!

2 *Now face a different partner and show me a freeze of Brunetta persuading Chichibìo to give her a leg of the delicious roasted crane … 3–2–1 Freeze!*

3 *Now find a new partner. One of you is Currado standing angrily at the table, pointing at the roasted crane and arguing with Chichibìo, who is trying to convince him that cranes only have one leg … 3–2–1 Freeze! Now relax.*

The pairs on this side of the room are going to show their freeze to the students opposite. 3–2–1 Freeze! Now the pairs on the other side. 3–2–1 Freeze!

4 *Find another partner, and let's bring the next freeze to life. One of you is Chichibìo in the early morning showing Currado that the cranes in the lake have just one leg each. 3–2–1 Freeze!*

Keep that freeze, and when I say 'Action!' you're going to act out that scene with words, using your hands, your faces, your bodies, your voices. Get ready to bring the scene to life … 3–2–1 Action!

Before you act it out a second time, decide on the freeze you'll make to finish the scene … 3–2–1 Freeze!

You already know what you're going to say in this scene, so focus on listening to each other and taking turns to speak. Make sure your voices, your expressions, your actions and your emotions are clear, and remember to finish with a freeze. Make your starting freeze again … 3–2–1 Action!

Next, invite a pair who have acted out the scene well to show it to the whole class, starting with their freeze. Before they start, ask the others to notice what works particularly well in the pair's performance, and to be ready to tell them at the end. They can pay attention to their use of freeze, physical acting, facial expression, voice, emotion, humour and creativity.

Now ask the students to get into new groups of three and give them a few minutes to rehearse their own version of the whole story before performing it to another group. The performance should include narrative storytelling, examples of freeze and the acting out of some scenes. You might suggest that one student both narrates the story and plays the role of Brunetta, while the other two play the roles of Currado and Chichibìo, but allow for innovation and creativity in how each group interprets the story.

Make sure all the performing groups start at the same time. After each performance, the listening students can give positive feedback to the performing students about their use of freeze, physical acting, facial expression, voice, emotion, humour and creativity.

When all the groups have finished, point out that the performance will improve through repetition, so ask each group to perform to a different group and get feedback. After each group has performed to at least two different groups, invite one or two volunteer groups to perform to the whole class.

When one group of teenage students were doing their performance to the rest of a class I was teaching in Gouda the other day, all their classmates spontaneously stood on one leg and pretended to be sleeping cranes!

This drama-based response to a story not only gives the students the opportunity to enjoy exploring and interpreting the story from different characters' perspectives, but also makes the story easy for them to remember and retell.

You can learn this story by listening to me telling it to international teenage students at *https://youtu.be/sUqq7Q7BLec* or by reading it below. You can download a copy from the *ETp* website at **www.etprofessional.com/media/35189/etp-128-onlineresources_studentstories18.pdf**. ■

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

Chichibìo and the crane

Once upon a time, there was a rich man called Currado who loved hunting. One day, Currado killed a crane and brought it to his cook, Chichibìo.

'Chichibìo, take this wonderful bird and prepare a delicious meal for me and my guests.'

Chichibìo plucked the crane and began to roast it above the fire. Soon there was a delicious smell of roasting meat.

In the same street, there lived a young woman called Brunetta whom Chichibìo desired. Brunetta could smell the delicious meat and came into the kitchen.

'Chichibìo, the meat smells so good. Give me a leg, Chichibìo.'

'Brunetta, I am roasting this crane for my master, Currado. You won't get what you want from me. You won't get what you want from *me*.'

'Chichibìo, if you don't give me a leg of the roasted crane, you won't get what you want from me. You won't get what you want from *me*!'

Chichibìo thought Brunetta was very beautiful, so he cut off one of the legs and gave it to her.

Then Chichibìo brought the plate with the roasted crane to the dinner table where his rich master, Currado, was sitting with his guests.

'What's this, Chichibìo? This crane has only one leg!'

'Yes, Master, cranes only have one leg.'

'Nonsense! You think I've never seen a crane? Cranes have two legs, like all birds.'

'No, no, no, Master. Cranes only have one leg, I promise you.'

Currado was angry and jumped to his feet:

'Chichibìo, you are a liar!'

'No, Master Currado, if you come down to the lake with me at sunrise tomorrow morning, I'll show you that cranes have only one leg.'

Currado was furious but he didn't want to hit Chichibìo in front of his guests.

'Chichibìo, I will come with you at sunrise tomorrow and you'll see that cranes have two legs. Then, I'll give you a punishment you won't forget for the rest of your days!'

Currado sent Chichibìo away and shared the delicious roasted crane meat with his guests.

That night, Master Currado was still so angry that he could hardly sleep. At sunrise the next morning, he was still feeling angry with his cook, Chichibìo, as they made their way down to the lake. All the cranes were still asleep, each one standing on one leg.

'Look! You see, Master Currado, cranes have just one leg, as I told you.'

Currado shouted and clapped his hands loudly, waking and frightening all the cranes. As each crane woke up, it put out its second leg, ran forward, opened its wings, took to the air and flew away.

Currado was angry.

'Chichibìo, look! As I told you, all cranes have two legs, not one! You lied to me and now I'm going to punish you!'

'Master, you are right,' said Chichibìo. 'You have shown me that cranes do have

two legs. It's amazing. But, dear Master, if you had shouted and clapped at the roasted crane last night at dinner, it would have put out its second leg too.'

Currado was so surprised by Chichibìo's answer that his anger suddenly turned to laughter.

'Chichibìo, perhaps you're right! Chichibìo, you must be right!'

Currado enjoyed Chichibìo's answer so much that Chichibìo escaped his punishment, and there was once more peace between master and cook.

A celebration of Langwich Scool

Jon Marks

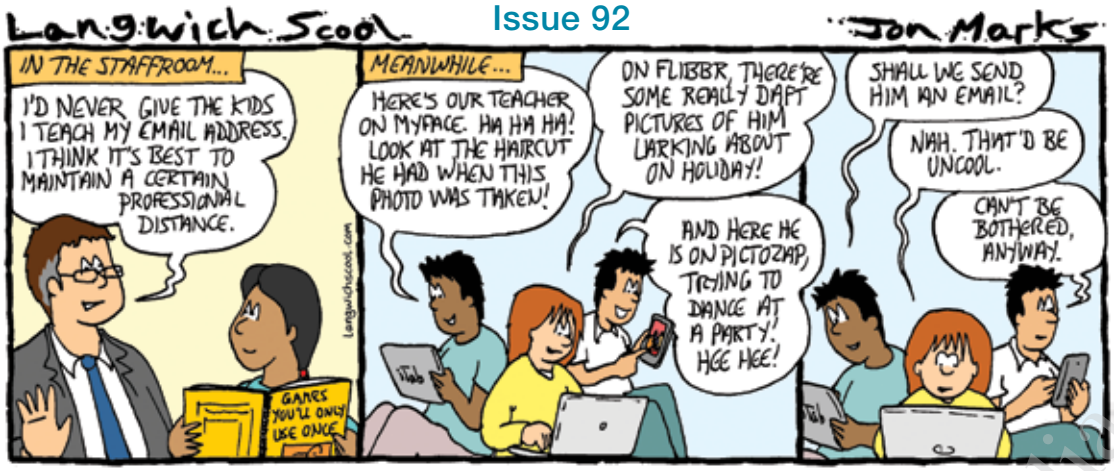
As editor, I am very sad to have to report that, after over 20 years, Langwich Scool is finally closing its doors.

Jon Marks's popular strip cartoon made its first appearance back in October 1999 in Issue 13 of *ETp*. Since then, Jon has entertained us in every issue of the magazine with his wry commentary on the state of English language teaching. (And it's always worth reading the titles of any coursebooks pictured in Jon's cartoons, as well as any posters on the walls!)

So, before the DOS of Langwich Scool switches off the lights and locks the front door, let's take a look back at what we have learnt there ...

Asked to nominate his favourite Langwich Scool cartoon, editorial consultant Mike Burghall, one of the people who launched *ETp* in October 1996, said that singling out any particular cartoon was hard because they were all so consistently clever, but, if pushed – and out of great affection for Langwich Scool – he would have to nominate the first one. So here it is, published several years before *ETp* was produced in colour, and revealing a technological problem of the time.

Having charted well over 20 years of developments in the field of ELT, it is not surprising that changes in technology are well documented. Back in 1999, it was electronic calculators that were causing strife in the classroom; now, we have malfunctioning interactive whiteboards to contend with, as pictured in Issue 124.



And, of course, the students are always way ahead of the teachers when it comes to technology.

One of my own personal favourites is from Issue 21, on a topic that continues to occupy the minds of teachers and students around the world. It seems the matter of the dating of coursebooks is a perennial problem – and one that will most likely continue into the future, as the cartoon from Issue 44 predicts.

In the course of 114 Langwich Scool cartoons, we have witnessed the shortcomings of technology, institutions and materials; we have been introduced to a range of students – the bemused, the wily and the intransigent; we have met pushy parents with outrageously unrealistic expectations, eccentric teachers who play 15th-century folk songs in class; and, of course, ordinary teachers trying to do their job as best they can, but not always getting it right.

So I will end with the lovely cartoon from Issue 45, in which you can see the dire effects of focusing too much on the teaching of idioms.

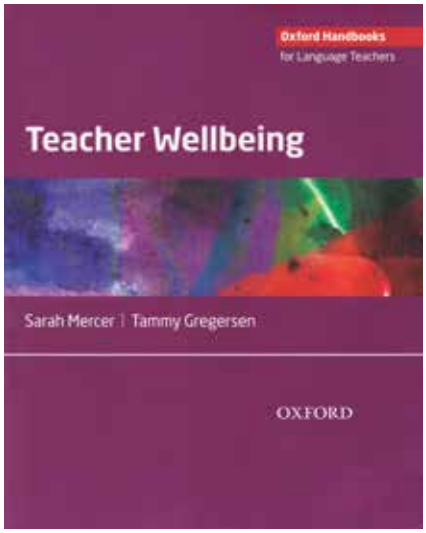
Thank you, Jon, for all the laughs you have given us over the years.

Helena

Reviews

Teacher Wellbeing

by Sarah Mercer and Tammy Gregersen
OUP 2020
978-0-19-440563-8



This timely book encourages teachers to think about themselves for a change. The stresses of being a teacher are well documented and often include heavy workloads, ever-increasing amounts of admin, lack of financial rewards, lack of support and/or respect from parents and employers, difficult students, time spent in preparing lessons and materials, and other out-of-hours requirements ... the list goes on. Sometimes, you wonder why anyone would want to become a teacher in the first place – and it's easy to see why burnout is a serious problem in our profession. In the current Covid-19 crisis, the stresses and strains of a teaching career are even more evident, with teachers having to scramble to learn new technologies and prepare new materials in different formats, in order to teach their lessons online and to keep their students on course, without being able to interact with them face-to-face.

However, it seems that those drawn to a teaching career are hard-wired to help other people or, as the authors of this book put it, they *'have a heart for service to others'*. If we accept that this is so, it is, perhaps, no wonder that the book begins with an exhortation for teachers to focus their attention on themselves for once. And the authors acknowledge that this may be hard for some people to do, without incurring feelings of guilt and a sense that they are being self-seeking or egocentric. Beginning with Chapter 1 ('It's all about me'), the authors present eight chapters with 'me' in the title: 'Me and my workplace', 'Me and my mind', 'Me and my motivation', 'Me and my relationships', 'Me and my emotions', 'Me and my physical wellbeing' and 'Me and my future' – all of which coax and cajole those who generally spend most of their time thinking about other people and their demands into considering *themselves* and their *own* needs.

Most of the book, necessarily, focuses on what individual teachers can do to promote their own wellbeing, though there is a recognition that teacher wellbeing is a shared responsibility, and Chapter 2 does go into the characteristics of institutions that foster job satisfaction – and the people in charge of educational establishments would do well to look at this part of the book, even if they don't read the rest. (Teachers could always lure reluctant bosses in with the suggestion that improving teacher wellbeing ultimately leads to better teachers, and having better teachers might result in greater prestige and greater profits.)

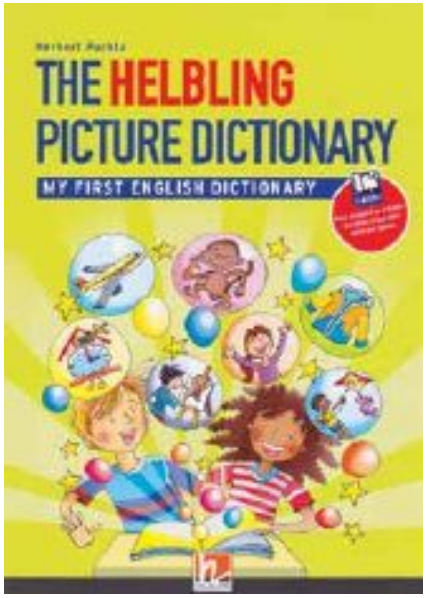
Each chapter begins with an introduction, followed by more detailed explorations of the different aspects of the main topic, interspersed with activities that can be done alone, though it might be even more productive to do some of these with colleagues (or, at least, compare results with a friend or colleague). There are also inspirational quotations scattered in the margins throughout, offering the thoughts of a host of thinkers and writers – from Gandhi and the Dalai Lama to Bill Gates and Eleanor Roosevelt. The chapter ends with a summary, a series of questions for reflection and three books or articles in a 'Recommended reading' section. I like the way the suggestions are restricted to three items each time: it can be daunting to be faced with a long list of things to read – something likely to result in more stress, and perhaps even feelings of guilt, if it proves impossible to track down and get through them all. Three items seem much more doable. For those with plenty of time on their hands (surely not teachers!) there is a full bibliography at the back of the book, as well as a helpful glossary of terms.

I suppose that, in essence, this is a self-help book, but one without the preaching tone or false optimism characteristic of some works in that genre. It doesn't set out to offer a prescription for wellbeing, but a selection of ideas which teachers can choose from, according to their own situations and their own needs. I can see it being of great help to teachers who actively want to remain in the profession, but have received a bit of a jolt to their confidence or a dent in their motivation. Each chapter can be read in isolation, and readers can dip in and out of the book according to their current needs. The book certainly doesn't offer a panacea for all the problems that teachers might experience, but it does go some way towards persuading them that they have the power in their own hands to make things better and to nurture and enhance their own wellbeing. This is a welcome message at any time, but perhaps most of all now when there is so much uncertainty in the world.

Sophie Hughes
Preston, UK

The Helbling Picture Dictionary

by Herbert Puchta
Helbling 2020
978-3-99089-131-5



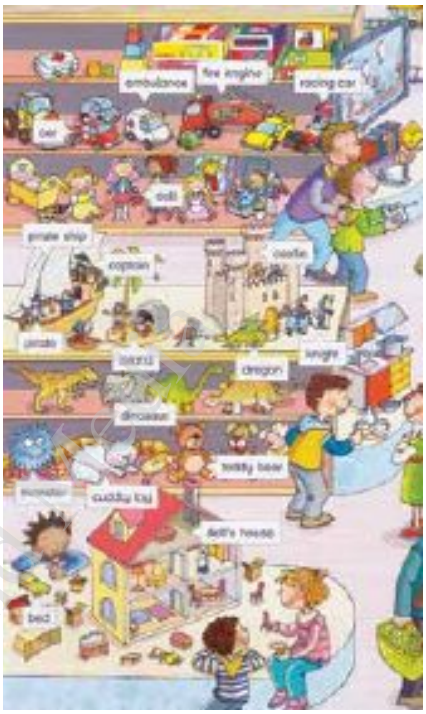
A good picture dictionary is always a useful thing to have in the primary classroom, and this is certainly a richly-illustrated one that should find favour with young children. There is much to explore in the bright and cheery, but somewhat crowded, pictures, each taking up a double-page spread and focusing on a particular topic, such as *Family*, *At the pet shop*, *In town*, *At the supermarket*, etc. In fact, some of the more 'busy' pictures have a similar look to the 'Where's Wally?' books, in which readers have to find a small character in a striped hat and jersey hidden in a series of complicated scenes. Nevertheless, the artists (Mirelli Mariani and Mercè Ortí – rather surprisingly credited only on the imprint page) are to be congratulated on having squeezed so much into each picture whilst keeping every single item clearly identifiable.

Not all the items shown in the pictures in this dictionary are labelled, but I see this as an advantage rather than an oversight, as too many word labels would reduce the attractiveness of the pictures. Furthermore, I can see children wanting to find out the words for the things that are *not* labelled as much as the ones that are. Some degree of learner curiosity and learner autonomy may well be prompted by exploration of the unlabelled items, and while the children's eyes are roving over the details of the picture to see what else is there, they are likely to be absorbing the language from the word labels.

The book comes with an access code for an associated e-book, which features the pronunciation of all the words presented, together with a series of games to consolidate the children's vocabulary learning (mainly matching games, such as pelmanism and matching picture and audio, but also a fun darts game in which you hear a word and have to hit a balloon carrying the correct picture with a dart).

Someone – either one of the artists or the author – seems to have a bit of an obsession with pirate ships (I counted five throughout the book, but there may well be more), and if one were to be picky, the lifestyles pictured are a bit cosy and middle class but, of course, one shouldn't expect gritty realism in a dictionary for children. (Having said that, *divorced*, *single mum* and *single dad* are given in the useful phrases section of the 'Family' spread, which goes some way towards reflecting the realities of modern life.) Some of the words may also be a little old-fashioned or low-frequency – I can't remember the last time I needed to refer to a *clockmaker* or a *bearded dragon* – but, on the whole, the topics and words are well-chosen.

After each of the 25 picture spreads, the labelled words (and other useful words on the same topic) are listed (and colour-coded according to the part of speech), with space for the children to add translations or examples. There are also useful phrases and sentences related to the topic, again with room for notes or translations, plus a couple of



illustrations with speech bubbles, showing some of the words being used in short conversations.

The introduction features four sections: 'Welcome children!', 'Welcome teachers and parents!', 'Using the HELBLING Picture Dictionary' and 'Using your e-book+'. Although the expectation is clearly that the dictionary can be used for self-study, the 'Welcome children!' section is written in language likely to be beyond the level of the children for whom the book is intended, so some degree of teacher and/or parental intervention will be needed, at least to get the children started.

James Pointon
Sefton, UK

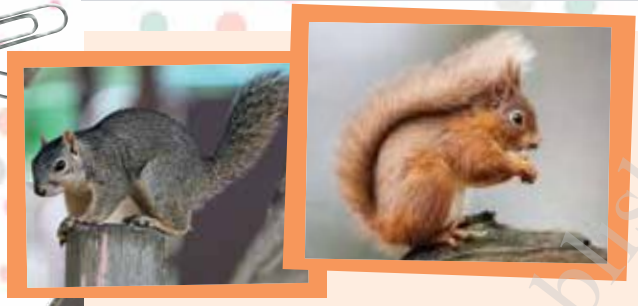
SCRAPBOOK

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

The director general of the World Health Organisation has reportedly commented that the current Covid-19 epidemic poses a very grave threat to the entire globe. He went on to say: *'To be honest, a virus is more powerful in creating political, economic and social upheaval than any terrorist attack.'*

Judging by the number of postings I have seen on social media, it seems that, as well as bringing out the worst in people (who could predict fighting over toilet paper in supermarkets?), a threat can sometimes bring out the best in us. Some of the more delightful items have been illustrations of the creative ways in which people have been tackling the boredom of quarantine and self-isolation. Following the challenges issued by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles and several other museums around the world to recreate famous paintings, making use of only those sharing your isolation and the things in your houses, many people have posted wonderful photos of themselves, their family members and their pets. You can see a selection of these at *https://tinyurl.com/w5xcr99*.

In the current climate, many of us feel somewhat under siege from the one single threat of Covid-19. Perhaps we should widen our focus and gain a little perspective by looking at some of the other things that threaten our species and our planet – including, of course, ourselves!



Invasion!

I'm sure we can all think of invasive species – plants or animals which have been introduced to a place or country other than their original one. Often this has happened deliberately, particularly in the plant world where owners of exotic gardens have acquired a non-native plant for its looks or its rarity. Other species, notably insects, have made the journey by 'stowing away' in food shipments or on cargo vessels.

In the UK, prime examples of invasive species are the grey squirrel (brought over from North America) and many species of tree-destroying beetle.

The 'invasive' bit really comes into play when the foreign plant or creature becomes a threat in its new home. This is often because it has no natural predators in the new environment, so its numbers are able to increase unchecked.

The grey squirrel, apart from being bigger and more aggressive than the indigenous red squirrel, carries a disease which is fatal to its red cousins. As a consequence, there are only a few pocketts in the UK where the red squirrel exists, whereas the Yankee version is to be found everywhere.

Here are some examples of the most spectacular invaders in the world:

Kudzu

This perennial vine is native to Southeast Asia, but it was taken to the United States in the 1870s, where it was promoted as a hardy, fast-growing plant that could help inhibit soil erosion. It also found favour as an ornamental plant that could grow over porches to provide shade. What its supporters failed to mention, however, was just how fast they meant when they said that kudzu was 'fast growing'. Since its introduction, this plant has been spreading across the US at a rate of some 600,000,000 square metres annually, smothering everything in its path. Its success is due primarily to the fact that individual vines can grow nearly half a metre a day, given the right conditions.

The Asian tiger mosquito

This mosquito is easily identified by its distinctive black and white striped body. Originally native to Southeast Asia, it has quickly become one of the Earth's most widely-distributed animal species: in the last 20 years alone, it has spread to at least 28 countries. This insect has apparently been aided and abetted by the international tyre trade: tyres stored outside tend to collect and retain rainwater, thus providing the ideal living and breeding conditions. Like other mosquitoes, it carries diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, but it presents an increased threat to humans because it feeds 24 hours a day (unlike most species of mosquito, which only feed at dusk and dawn).

Coffee under threat?

If you live in one of the countries that observe 'daylight saving time', and you think that putting the clocks forward by an hour in spring is the biggest threat to your ability to keep awake in the morning, you may want to consider the problem of coffee leaf rust: a fungus that is the most economically damaging coffee pest in the world. Since the 1980s, there have been occasional significant outbreaks which have put a huge dent into coffee production, resulting at times in a doubling or even tripling of the price. The problem has grown much worse in recent years, despite massive resources being invested in trying to defeat it.

A curious and intriguing possibility for controlling this costly pest is actually a small snail. Scientists have found that Asian tramp snails can consume large amounts of coffee rust – and can do so before the disease can damage the plant. A single snail placed on a rust-covered leaf will consume as much as 30 percent of the fungus within a day.

The Burmese python

This more than substantial snake (anything up to six metres in length) provides the perfect example of what can happen when a large predatory species arrives in an environment where the native wildlife is ill-prepared to cope with it. The snakes are native to the subtropical areas of Southern Asia, but they were introduced into the wild in the southern USA by irresponsible pet owners. Florida now has an estimated population of 30,000 pythons, which have made a habit of feasting on a variety of endangered birds – and even alligators.

The cane toad

Some species are introduced into new regions as a form of pest control. Sometimes, they actually do a pretty good job of handling the pest problem, but in some cases, they do such a good job that they become an enormous pest problem themselves. The cane toad is one such species. A native of South and Central America, it was introduced to several sugar cane growing areas, including Australia. Unfortunately, its voracious appetite for sugar cane pests extended to just about anything else that crossed its path and would fit into its huge mouth. Given that a cane toad can grow to well over 30 cm long, this covers a large number of indigenous species. In addition to this, the toad secretes a poisonous ooze on its skin, which is capable of killing just about any animal it comes into contact with. These traits, coupled with the toad's fondness for sitting in toilet bowls (giving the prospective user a very unpleasant shock), makes it very unpopular indeed with animals and humans alike.

How big a pest are we?

It actually seems to *me* that probably the most invasive species on the planet is – us.

We invade everywhere from the UK's Brighton beach on a sunny day to the Amazon rainforest, caring little for the consequences.

A businessman walks into a forest. Then the forest disappears.

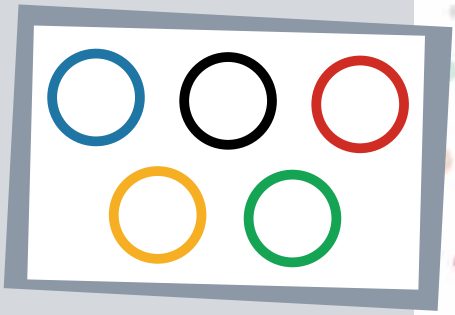
The latest 'Sounds of the Rainforest' CD that I bought was not as relaxing as I hoped. The first half was birds chirping, but the rest was just chainsaws and bulldozers.

Come to that, my remote Viking ancestry makes me an invasive species of a sort, even though I have stopped wearing my horned helmet in public. Not content with our own conquest of most parts of the world, a quick review of the invasive plants and animals I started with shows that they have all been introduced by mankind. Oops!

In the context of today's world events, or rather event, the expression *going viral* has an unfortunate ring to it. What this saying has come to mean is 'widespread and rapid propagation'. As a race, we have come to do that very effectively; so what's the difference between us and a virus, given that both can, in their own ways, pose huge threats to others? There has been much debate as to whether a virus actually constitutes a living entity, as it only 'comes to life' by invading the cells of other creatures. Hmmm – I am sure we can all think of people who fit that description …

Random results of Covid-19

Prediction: There will be a minor baby boom in nine months, and then one day in 2033, we will witness the rise of the 'Quaranteens'.



There are reports that the Olympic flag is to be redesigned, taking into account the need for social distancing ...

The grocery stores in France look as if they have been hit by a tornado. All that's left is *de brie*.

What do you call panic-buying of sausage and cheese in Germany? The Wurst Käse scenario.

It's my third day without live sports on TV. This afternoon, I found a young woman sitting on my sofa. Apparently, she's my wife. She seems rather nice …

I went to the chemist's to collect some medicine. They wouldn't accept cash, because of the risk of passing on the coronavirus. But when I got my credit card out, ready to pay, the cashier said: *Strip down, facing me*. Making a mental note to complain about these new invasive drug control laws, I did as she instructed. After her hysterical shrieking subsided, I realised she was referring to exactly how I should place my credit card in the card reader. I still don't think I looked *that bad* naked.

Invaders from afar

On the following page is a 'gapped text' exercise, based on an article about invasive species, for you to use with your students. You can download a copy from the *ETp* website at **www.etprofessional.com/media/35188/etp-128-online resources_invadersfromafar.pdf**.

Answers: 1F, 2C, 3G, 4E, 5A, 6D

Invaders from afar

Read the following article about the problems of invasive species. Six sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the seven sentences underneath (A–G) the one which fits each gap. There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Invaders from afar

An invasive species is an animal or plant that is not native to a particular area – yet, for one reason or another, it is living there, and its numbers have got out of control. The natural world has its own balance: each living thing provides food for another and, as a result, the numbers of each species remain fairly stable. 1 Sometimes, the introduction of a non-native species into a new area is accidental. 2 However, there are many cases where people have deliberately introduced a foreign species in order to solve a problem, with disastrous consequences.

Rabbits are one example. They were introduced into Australia as a food source by European settlers who wanted to hunt them. Rabbits are well-known for the speed at which they reproduce, and numbers are now so high that millions could be removed each year without threatening the overall population. 3 They eat crops, destroy native plants, cause serious soil erosion and compete with other animals for food and shelter. 4 Those predators then eat native species such as wombats, bilbys and wallabys, whose numbers are now in serious decline.

Another disastrous introduction to Australia – and other places – was the cane toad. The intention was to make use of it to fight infestations of insects on crops. 5 To make matters worse, the cane toad's skin is highly toxic, so it is also threatening the populations of would-be predators, such as crocodiles. Whereas in its native environment of South and Central America, the creature has a number of predators that seem to be unaffected by the toxin, in Australia, there are almost none.

A current problem in many countries is a vigorous plant called Japanese knotweed, introduced by gardeners who thought it was pretty. 6 Unfortunately, these means of control are absent in American and European countries, so the plant grows unchecked. Resistant to chemicals and very hard to dig up, as breaking the stems and roots simply causes more of them to grow, knotweed can grow up to 10 cm per day, and soon covers and kills other plants. Its strong roots and underground stems can even damage buildings. So what should be done? Some people would like to introduce the fungus and beetle that control the plant in Asia. But would this be a solution to the problem – or might these introductions bring further problems of their own?

A Unfortunately, it started eating animals other than pests, and now it has put reptiles, birds and small rodents at risk.

B A fierce fish called the Nile perch was introduced into Lake Victoria in East Africa as a food source.

C For example, the black rat is not native to Europe, but travelled there from Asia on board trading ships.

D As the name suggests, this is a native of Asian countries, where its spread is limited by a beetle and a fungus.

E In addition, they provide food for predators such as foxes, feral cats and dingoes, whose populations have also soared as a result.

F However, this equilibrium can be destroyed if something with no predators to keep its numbers in check is introduced from outside.

G Their effect on the environment has been disastrous.

Types of motivation

Charlie Taylor believes in the efficacy of intrinsic motivation.

According to Nasser Oroujlou and Majid Vahedi, *'successful language learning is linked to the learner's passion. And instructors should find ways to connect to this passion'*.

Imagine two teachers who are both trying to motivate their students to read books in English:

- Teacher A selects a book which he thinks is level- and age-appropriate, and assigns it to the class. Then he offers the students jellybeans if they read the book, and threatens bad grades if they do not.
- Teacher B brings in a large selection of level- and age-appropriate books, reads the first few pages of a few of them aloud to the class, and then allows the students to choose whatever books they want to read for themselves, as a special treat for being such great students.

Which students are more likely to view reading as a pleasurable activity in and of itself, and which are more likely to view it as an onerous chore that must be completed if they are to receive the reward or avoid the punishment? Which are more likely to become lifelong passionate readers of English, and which are more likely never to read a book in English again, once the reward/punishment structure is removed from the equation at the end of the course? Which are more likely to try to defeat the system by finding ways to trick the teacher into thinking they have read the book when they really have not?

Most people will instinctively say that Teacher B will have the greater success, and research supports this. According to Stephen Krashen, studies have shown that having a greater selection of titles increases reading comprehension in extensive reading programmes. But why does giving the students greater choice over the material they are consuming yield larger language acquisition benefits? The answer lies in the different types of motivation that Teacher A and Teacher B are tapping into.

Extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation

It should come as no surprise to anyone that student motivation is critical to acquiring *any* skill – and language proficiency is no exception. However, not all

motivation is created equal. There are numerous ways to classify the different types of motivation that are involved in second language acquisition, but in this article we will focus on the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, look at which of these is better for the purposes of language acquisition, and consider how we can help foster it in our students.

- Intrinsic motivation is the sort of motivation you experience when you find the subject matter interesting in and of itself. You want to learn more because you are fascinated. It is the motivation that makes it hard to put down a good book, or puts burning questions into your brain that simply must be answered right away.
- Extrinsic motivators, on the other hand, come from outside. They are the metaphorical carrot and stick, used to coerce students into cooperating. When students find material boring, teachers will often use extrinsic motivators to get compliance in the classroom: 'You must pay attention, or you will fail the test' or 'If you participate in this activity, you will get a reward'.

Of these two types of motivation, unsurprisingly, intrinsic is far more effective. Extrinsic motivators might win short-term compliance, but they might also breed resistance. Rewarding somebody for a task is bad psychology: it can make even an enjoyable activity seem like work.

Robert Weinberg relates a story about an old man who wanted some children to stop playing baseball in his yard. Rather than chasing them

away, he paid them a salary to play. Then he cut the wage, and they stopped coming. The old man had replaced the children's intrinsic interest in playing baseball with an extrinsic interest in earning money, and then reduced the extrinsic motivator. By this logic, offering rewards for doing pleasurable activities like reading is a great way to make that activity seem unappealing and ensure it is not pursued once the reward is removed.

Unfortunately, in ELT classrooms around the world, teachers rely heavily on extrinsic motivators.

The reason for this is that only a small minority of language students is fascinated by grammatical structures and word meanings. If you are working in a classroom that uses traditional skill-building methods, you will be lucky to find one student out of 20 who is genuinely interested in the subject matter you are covering, while the rest are languishing in boredom, perhaps tuning in occasionally to get a treat or to avoid failing a test. Once the test is overcome, the short-term memory will quickly jettison the unwanted information.

Interesting classes

There is, however, an alternative to using such extrinsic motivators, and that is to make English lessons interesting. When I say *interesting*, I mean genuinely compelling – not 'fun' in the sense of playing games with fuzzy dice and sticky balls. I mean having content that captivates the attention of the students and makes them forget they are communicating in a foreign language. This is what Stephen Krashen called entering a 'state of flow', and it is when language acquisition occurs best.

When using communicative language teaching strategies, there is no 'material', as such, that needs to be covered. As long as the students are getting input they understand, the subject matter can be as varied as the interests of the students in your classroom. This gives teachers a tremendous amount of flexibility to *work with* the students to build a curriculum that captures their attention. Instructors are not limited by trying to create lesson plans around the second conditional; they can discuss Korean pop groups or design a collaborative project about manga comics. The language acquisition happens subconsciously.

Tapping into your students' intrinsic interests

Many language teachers might find it difficult to bridge the age gaps and culture gaps between themselves and their students when trying to find material that their students will find compelling. It is possible, but it can be a lengthy process involving a lot of trial and error. Better yet, the students should have a direct say in what sort of material they will be using. Unfortunately, most teachers have external restrictions placed on what material they cover in their classes, as they are required to use a certain textbook, or follow mandates from administrative bodies which have no familiarity with their students. However, in a student-centred classroom, the curriculum should ideally not be set in stone; it should evolve as the result of dialogue between the teacher and the students. The more flexibility teachers are able to negotiate with their employers, the greater the benefits for their students.

The job of the teacher should be to find subject matter in which the students will have an intrinsic interest, and use that topic as a delivery system for comprehensible input in the target language. This can be achieved by ensuring maximum student input and choice in material selection. It can also be done by using subject matter that is universally interesting. And there is one topic that everybody finds fascinating – *themselves*.

Interested students

When using communicative teaching methods, getting a conversation going is all you need for language acquisition to happen. Be genuinely interested in your students and learn about them. Ask them questions and care about the answers. Enjoy getting to know them. They will want to share information, and will forget they are conversing in a foreign language. Many strategies can help to break the ice and get the students talking about themselves. For example:

- Get them to show a photo from their cell phones and say what is happening in the picture.
- Get each student to say two true things about themselves and one lie. The other students can ask questions, and then guess which one is the lie.
- Select a different class leader every day who is responsible for coming to class equipped with a discussion question. By having the students select their own questions, you have a better chance of achieving the interest requirement because you bypass whatever age and culture gaps may exist.

♦ ♦ ♦

Somebody once asked me if teaching was not an incredibly boring profession because you have to teach the same material every year. I responded that I imagined it would be if you teach *material*, but I teach *students*, and every one of them is unique. So leave your stickers and jellybeans at home, and ensure your students are intrinsically motivated to communicate in English by discussing material they find genuinely interesting. ■

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Thumbs up! Thumbs down!

Mayuri Sooriyampola copes with large classes using gestures and mini-whiteboards.

I was inspired by Claudia Keh's article 'Red, green or white?' (*ETp* Issue 125). She describes a technique for getting feedback from her students on what they have or have not understood.

Here in Sri Lanka, we too face a lot of challenges in dealing with large classes. With 50 or more students per class, many teachers encounter difficulties in making their lessons student-centred. So we have to look for new techniques to make our interactions with our students effective and to get the maximum participation in our lessons.

In overcrowded classrooms, there is a tendency for the teacher to focus on the students at the front and get them involved in the lesson, as engaging the ones at the far back seems impossible. In addition, the teacher's voice may not carry far, with the result that those at the back can't hear and may lose track of the lesson. If this continues, the students in the back seats may even drop out of school. Claudia Keh's 'Red, green or white?' seems a very good idea for maximising student participation.

Use your thumbs

Sri Lankan teacher educators, in collaboration with the British Council, conducted a series of workshops where a simple technique for handling large classes was discussed and practised. Here, instead of using coloured cards as Claudia Keh suggests, the teacher gets the students to give a 'thumbs up' gesture if they agree with an answer and a 'thumbs down' gesture if they think it is incorrect. (You can also have a 'thumbs in the middle' gesture – thumb held out level and horizontal – to indicate that they are not sure.) This technique is simple and easy to carry out, does not need any preparation or materials, and can be used with any type of question, especially those which have binary choices as answers (eg Yes/No, True/False).

Simplifying Claudia Keh's technique makes it more useful in a low-resource context like Sri Lanka. Providing coloured cards (red, green) for all the students in a large class would need preparation and materials. Moreover, handing out and collecting the cards could be time-consuming.

Use mini-whiteboards

Going further, teachers can ask their students to write *corrected* versions of an answer on mini-whiteboards and hold them up for everybody to see. (If mini-whiteboards are unavailable, you can make your own with a piece of A4 paper inserted in a transparent plastic case. The students use whiteboard pens to write on the plastic. These home-made versions are reusable, as the writing can be wiped off with a tissue.) Using mini-whiteboards, even a student at the very back of a class of 100 students gets the chance to answer and to make their answer visible to everybody. That student then feels actively involved in the lesson.

A lesson using mini-whiteboards can also be made interactive. When the whiteboards are held up, the teacher can easily identify those students who have the answer correct and can ask them to get into groups with others sitting nearby who have incorrect answers. They can then be asked to discuss the answers and help the others to get the correct answer. In a large class, it is difficult for the teacher to address all the students' problems at the same time. In addition, it is beneficial for the students to interact with one another.

If the students still have issues after discussing their answers in groups, they can use their mini-whiteboards to ask for assistance. If several groups raise the same issue, the teacher can use that problem to start a whole-class discussion.

Once the students have discussed and helped each other with the answers, the teacher can ask more questions, to check whether those who got their answers incorrect the first time have got them correct this time. This way, the teacher can get quick feedback on the students' achievement of the learning outcomes. If some class members still have problems, the teacher can consider remedial measures for those who need them.

Feedback and classroom management

The mini-whiteboards and 'thumbs up/down' techniques not only give rapid feedback, but almost all the students are involved in the feedback process. If a teacher asks a question and chooses a student at random to answer, they will not know how many of the rest of the class know the answer. Another great advantage is that these techniques involve the minimum of noise.

Classroom management in a large class is daunting, even for experienced teachers. The immediate feedback the teacher gets about how well the students have achieved the target learning outcomes will assist them in planning future lessons.

Using *PowerPoint* slides and coloured cards may not be practical in a low-resourced classroom, but getting the students to use their own thumbs and writing on a mini-whiteboard (perhaps a home-made one) is not difficult to achieve, whatever the level of resources available. Furthermore, the two techniques discussed here can also be used with smaller classes, as they encourage the students to get involved in the lesson, even if they are reluctant to speak out.

Whatever the size of your class, this is a fun way to get everybody involved! ■

Mayuri Sooriyampola is a lecturer at the (Mahaweli) National College of Education in Kandy, Sri Lanka, which provides courses for pre-service teachers (intending to teach English). Her subjects are ELT Methods, Phonology and Sociology.
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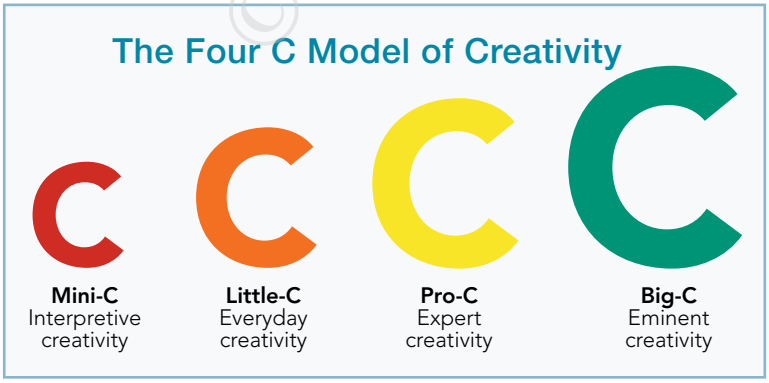
Creativity is contagious – pass it on!

Antonia Clare and **Alan Marsh** ask where great ideas come from – and it's not where you might think.

Where do you come up with your best ideas? It's probably not when you're sitting at your computer trying to come up with the solution to a problem or an idea for your next lesson. It's more likely to be when you're out for a walk, daydreaming on the bus or doing the washing up. Great ideas come when you aren't trying to think of them. Albert Einstein famously came up with some of his best scientific ideas when he played the violin during his breaks from work. Charles Dickens was a prolific walker, routinely fleeing his writing desk to walk 20 miles a day.

One thing often said about creative inspiration is that it happens when you're least expecting it and commonly comes from unexpected sources. It tends to occur when you stop thinking about a problem and give your mind a rest; it's when you allow the unconscious processes of your mind to do the work, without deliberately focusing on your problem, that suddenly everything falls into place.

We think it's the same for language learners. Every learner is different – they each have their own emerging, internal language syllabus. In the classroom, we may be focusing on a particular language point, because we're under pressure from the curriculum to do that – so we're looking at the present perfect (again) and practising it. There's a lot of focused, conscious learning going on, but we can't be sure how much this influences each learner's own language development.



However, if we engage the learners in some kind of unfocused task, where they stop thinking so overtly about the specific language point, but get involved in the task and want to communicate their ideas, they naturally start to notice and pay attention to a whole variety of language features. These may be things that they've already covered in earlier stages of their learning, or things that aren't explicitly focused on by the teacher or the materials. During this process, new language starts to become integrated into the learner's mental grammar/lexicon. Pennies will drop, bells will ring, lights will be switched on.

What do we mean by creativity?

There are many definitions and models of creativity. Most people think about 'big-C' creativity – creativity linked to eminent geniuses like da Vinci, Picasso and Mozart – and 'little-c' creativity – the everyday kind of creativity we exhibit when we conjure up a meal from leftovers, or rearrange flowers in a vase. We personally find it useful to look at what James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto call the 'four C' model of creativity, which includes pro-c and mini-c creativity, as shown the diagram on this page.

'Pro-c' looks at professional expertise, displayed by people who have become experts in their field, but have not (yet) reached eminent status.

'Mini-c' refers to the creativity inherent in the learning process. It is defined as the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions and events. It deals with what Beghetto and Kaufman call the *'interpretive process of constructing personal knowledge and understanding within a particular sociocultural context'*. At this stage, what you create may not be revolutionary, but it is new and meaningful to *you*. When a child does a painting in class or writes a story, these are examples of mini-c creativity.

So, why be creative in class?

1 Creative learning is meaningful.

As Rebecca Oxford points out, creative learning can offer us experiences that contribute to our own sense

of self-fulfilment and purpose. When a learner achieves something in the target language (performing well in a test, writing an informative essay, contributing to a good conversation) – anything that the learner creates contributes to this sense of meaning. In the same way, if the learner experiences something special and values it, that experience will offer meaning. This motivates learners, and the more meaningful we make the learning, the more likely it is to be remembered.

2 Creative learning is memorable.

Things that are unusual or peculiar stand out in our *memories*. When we find an interesting or different way to approach a topic or a new piece of language, if we look for a creative twist to a well-known activity, we're aiming to provide a memorable hook for the learners to remember the language. If we ask our learners to use language in a creative way, it's more likely to stick in their memory. If we involve the senses and use imagery and multimodality, we're likely to get deeper learning – the language will be more memorable.

3 Creative learning engages the emotions.

As Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio put it: *'We feel, therefore we learn.'* Emotions play a key role in the learning process. If you don't engage your learners' emotions, you're unlikely to get very deep learning. Immordino-Yang and Damasio go on to point out that it seems that emotion and cognition are clearly linked, so engaging the learners' emotions will affect their attention, motivation, decision-making and memory.

4 Creative teaching nourishes us as teachers.

We believe that the best kind of teaching is creative teaching. Creative teaching comes from the heart and brings with it an element of *surprise*. It involves the teacher looking for interesting and effective ways to engage the learners by using imaginative approaches in the classroom. It involves teachers taking risks and experimenting with new ideas. Creative teaching is a key contributor to teacher development. When we're creative and design successful learning experiences for our learners, it's satisfying for us: we develop as teachers and feel good about what we're doing. It helps us to remain fresh and enthusiastic in our work, which is a key factor in avoiding teacher burnout.

5 The world needs more creative thinkers.

Creativity often gets itself a bad name. Some people associate it with messiness or 'wacky' activities: fun activities for a Friday afternoon. For years, creativity has been downplayed in mainstream education – seen as the poor cousin of 'efficient' or 'serious' learning. As a result, teachers often say: *'I'd love to do more creative activities but I just don't have time, I have to work on exams/syllabus, etc.'* Creativity is seen as an optional extra, rather than an integral part of the learning process. However, creative thinking is an important 21st-century learning skill, increasingly recognised by employers, administrators, policy makers and others. We need a new generation of creative thinkers in all fields, from science to arts to business, to help us to find solutions to the problems we'll face in the future. So, we need to work within the constraints of our situation – not see constraints as the enemy. You can always work in a small five-to-ten-minute activity, a little creative twist somewhere in the lesson, if you feel it's important

enough. It's your classroom: what happens within those four walls is your decision. When being creative, there is often an element of defiance and going against established rules and practices.

6 Creativity is cumulative and cooperative.

Teachers sometimes claim that they aren't very creative because they don't have a lot of ideas. The great thing about ideas is that they were made for sharing. If you don't have interesting ideas of your own, steal some from someone else! Take an activity you've seen in a workshop or read about in an article and think about how it might work in your situation. Try it out, adapt it, make it your own.

Creativity in the classroom

Here are two ideas that have worked well for us, and which we'd like to share with you.

1 Show and imagine

This is a motivating, personalised activity where the students practise speaking fluency. It's based on a traditional 'show and tell' activity – but with a twist. You can also use it as a lead-in or lead-out to a lesson where the learners focus on describing objects. It can be used with any level from strong elementary (A1+) upwards.

Stage 1: Ask the students to draw a picture of something that is really important or significant to them. Preferably, this should be an inanimate object, but if you feel it necessary, they can include a pet. Set a time limit for the drawing, eg one minute. It doesn't need to be a work of art!

Stage 2: Put the students into pairs, A and B. Ask them to look at each other's drawings but to say nothing. Tell them that, in a moment, they will have to imagine that their partner's object is *theirs*, not their partner's, and they have to make up and tell their partner the following information (display it on a board or screen):

Imagine your partner's object is yours. Use your imagination to say:

1 what it is;
2 where and how you got it;
3 how long you've had it;
4 what it's made of (if it's an object);
5 why you like it;
6 an anecdote, story, incident or memory related to it;
7 any future plans you have related to it;
8 anything else you like.

Adapt the prompts to suit the level of your students.

Stage 3: Ask Student A to talk about 'their' object (ie the one in Student B's drawing). Tell Student B that they should look interested, nod their head, smile and use other back-channelling strategies (showing that they're following with interest) such as saying *Uh-huh, Really? Wow!* etc. Explain that they can also ask questions, eg *Where exactly was that?* When Student A has finished, Student B tells them the real information. Then they swap: Student B now talks about Student A's object and compares it with the real information.

Stage 4: Ask the pairs to report back to the class on any surprising information. Carry out a language review related to what the students actually said.

2 *I have …* a poem

The students write poems based on memorable, personal experiences, using sensory language. The activity can be used in a lesson focusing on the present perfect for experience. We first learnt of this poem and technique from Scott Thornbury.

Stage 1: Tell the students that you are going to read a poem (they don't see the text). Ask them to listen for information about the senses (things the writer sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes). Read the following poem:

I have ...

I have seen the sun in the morning on the hills,
turning the hills and the sky to fire.
I have heard a bird in its cage
crying for the sky it has lost.
I have touched the grass beside the river,
wet with spring rain.
I have smelled roses, dead roses
in an empty house that no one has visited.
And I have tasted salt from the sea,
alone, at night, on a beach, in a storm.
I have done these things, and these things have made me old.
I have remembered these things, and these memories
have made me young.

Stage 2: Ask the students to recall any of the images they remember from the text. Take feedback and hand out the poem or display it on a screen. Ask them if they enjoyed the poem, which particular images were powerful for *them* and why.

Stage 3: Give the students the following sentence prompts and ask them to write their own poems.

I have seen…
I have heard …
I have touched …
I have smelled …
I have tasted …
I have done …
I have remembered …

Stage 4: Allow the students time to work on their draft poems. They can ask you for help with any language they need. As they work, go around and help to edit the poems so that they are not full of mistakes. Get the students to share their poems with each other.

♦ ♦ ♦

Covid-19 is having a tremendously disruptive effect on education and is forcing change. Teachers around the world are working within huge constraints. But necessity is the mother of invention. As creative teachers, we can be flexible, and harness the power of our collective creativity to find opportunities for our learners and ourselves to become more empowered, creative and innovative. As Albert Einstein is widely rumoured to have said: *'Creativity is contagious – pass it on.'* ■

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Hopes and dreams

Huma Hasna Riaz Ahmed offers a morale-boosting online lesson.

Have you ever taught an online lesson without any materials? If you feel apprehensive about such a move, I would completely understand, because my feelings weren't any different a few years ago.

Current ELT practice embraces the idea that teachers and learners are active participants in making and shaping learning. Materials-light teaching – often referred to as 'Dogme ELT', following Luke Meddings and Scott Thornbury's book on the subject – is conversation-driven, uses few materials and focuses on emergent language; it thus enables the implementation of the current teaching philosophy.

Class consultation

Inspired by the Dogme ELT teaching approach, I logged in to my online classroom one day and asked my adult learners a question: *What would you like to learn today?* They looked puzzled, not knowing how to respond to such a question. The next question I tried was: *What are your hopes and dreams for the future?* Initially, this also drew a blank! What followed was a Dogme-style lesson in which I encouraged them to think and talk about hopes and dreams – a part of everyone's life, and something that is all the more relevant to us now in these turbulent times.

Here is my plan for a similar lesson, which looks forward to a time when we will be out of Covid-19 isolation and quarantine, and thus contributes to an atmosphere of hope.

This lesson can be made to last 60 minutes and could be adapted to suit any level or teaching context. It assumes that the teacher is able to conduct a live teaching session via *Zoom*, *Adobe Connect*, *Microsoft Teams*, or whatever videoconferencing platform they are using to connect with their students in a virtual classroom, and that the teacher has the facility to share their screen or a whiteboard with the students.

Hope for the future

Stage 1: Engage the students

Draw a bucket on the whiteboard in the main 'meeting room' in your virtual classroom, or project a picture of a bucket. Ask the students to draw a similar bucket on a blank sheet of paper and to list at least three things they *want* to do/have and three things they *don't wish* to do/have once the Covid-19 crisis is over. Tell them that they can put these in random order and that they should use only short phrases and key words, eg *Go for a walk*. Demonstrate this by writing examples of your own in the bucket on your whiteboard. Elicit what a 'bucket list' is (usually, a list of things that people want to do or achieve at some point in their lifetimes).

Invite the class to ask you questions about *your* bucket list, in order to find out more about the things you have said you wish to do and don't wish to do. If necessary, show them a list of questions and question prompts. Here are some examples that you can add to or adapt, as necessary:

- Why do you (not) want to do it?
- What exactly is that?
- Who (will you do it with)? Where (will you do it)?
- How can you achieve this?
- How would you feel? How might this change your life?

Stage 2: Work with the students

Give the students time to work individually on their bucket lists for what they want to do and don't want to do when the Covid-19 epidemic is over, encouraging them to add to their original ideas and also to think about their long-term dreams and hopes.

Set up breakout rooms for interaction and collaboration. (For those of you who are new to online teaching, 'breakout rooms' in videoconferencing platforms such as *Adobe Connect* and *Zoom* allow the teacher – or host – to put the students – the participants – into smaller groups for pair- and groupwork.)

When they are in their breakout rooms, get the students to hold their buckets up to the camera for the other members of their group to see, and to discuss their bucket lists, asking questions and discussing any similarities or differences of opinion, using the questions above. You will need to monitor the groups, recording the emerging language in a language box (see the next page), encouraging the students by asking questions of your own, and supporting and helping with language, when required. This is your opportunity to provide language input, so refrain from using a lot of metalanguage (the language that teachers use to talk about language, eg *infinitive*, *verb*, *noun*, etc). Introduce semi-fixed expressions, such as *I've always dreamt of …*, as language chunks, instead of focusing on their structure (though sometimes it may be useful to point out the verb pattern, eg that *I've always dreamt of …* is usually followed by an *-ing* verb).

Similarly, adopt a lexical approach to grammar items, wherever possible. For example, if you choose to focus on the

Language box

Vocabulary

- Adventure sports (*skydiving, zip line, kayaking*, etc)
- *Make/do* collocations (eg *go swimming, walking*)
- Jobs (focus on pronunciation)
- Tourist destinations – names of countries and cities (focus on pronunciation)

Functional language / grammar

I hope/wish ...
I'd like/love to ...
I want to ...

I've always dreamt of ...

I've been dying to ...
I've always fancied ...
... is not my thing.
I don't wish to ...
You wouldn't catch me ...

Second conditional (lexical approach)
Question forms

second conditional, introduce or review this language item as a lexical chunk, ie *If I had/could ..., I would ...*, instead of worrying about the structure, which the students will ultimately deduce by practising and recycling. The focus is on engaging in meaningful conversation, so focus on pronunciation, including weak forms and intonation, whenever required.

In the language box diagram above are some examples of emergent language that may occur at this stage. Remember to work with the language *your students* produce at this stage, though you can make suggestions that will make the language more appropriate for its purpose.

Save the language box in a *Word* document, or take a screenshot and share it with your students. Next, re-group the students or change the pairs, to give them a chance to repeat the exercise following your input. This stage is critical to the lesson. You should monitor, to support and help.

Bring all the students back to the main meeting, and ask them to report back on any particularly interesting information they learnt about each other.

Stage 3: Challenge the students

Ask the students to choose some of the wishes their classmates talked about and to prepare to say whether or not *they* would like to do or have these things – and why.

Put the students into breakout rooms again, making sure they work with different classmates this time. Ask them to talk about their *new* dreams and hopes (the ones they have 'borrowed' from other students). Encourage them to use some language from the language box. Demonstrate how they can express their dislikes more politely and appropriately, using some functional language in the language box.

Finally, conduct a poll in the main meeting room and get the students to vote for the most popular ideas.

Back to the future

For homework, encourage the students to write a letter to their future self on *Futureme.org*. This site offers people the chance to write a letter (actually an email) to be delivered to themselves one year, three years or five years from now (they can also choose a specific date for it to be delivered). Tell them that they should write about what they want to do when the current health crisis is over, and at least one long-term dream or goal, stating how and when they hope to achieve it. Students find this exciting and inspiring, and they can, if they wish, choose to send a copy of the email to you for feedback.

♦ ♦ ♦

So, next time you worry about what you are going to teach in your online lesson, take a deep breath, think outside the box, encourage an atmosphere of hope, and remember that you have the most important resource of all – your learners! ■

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Coach potatoes

Rose Aylett offers some alternative advice to combat training fatigue.

Are INSETT (in-service teacher training) sessions at your school getting a little predictable? Does next week's training slot 'spark joy'? For its simplicity, structure and cost-efficiency, the INSETT is a regular feature of many school CPD programmes. Increasingly, however, I've noticed the format and content of these sessions leading to 'training fatigue' – a reluctance on the part of teachers to attend traditional classroom-based teacher training. If they are to engage staff over the long term and have a real impact on classroom teaching, our INSETT sessions need an overhaul.

This article will highlight three creative alternative formats for in-service teacher training, to help mix things up a bit …

Training fatigue

Do anything the same way enough times and it gets stale. We all know this to be true in our classrooms but, of course, the same is also true of professional development programmes. I'd be the first to admit that, unfortunately, the teacher training I deliver doesn't always embody the spontaneity and levels of engagement I am trying to engender in my own classroom teaching. In the longer term, this can have a detrimental impact on teacher motivation.

The term I'm using to describe this phenomenon, *training fatigue*, is borrowed from the world of sport. Athletes are said to suffer from training fatigue when they train intensively over a long period of time and don't allow their bodies appropriate rest. Typical symptoms include lack of energy and enthusiasm for their workout. In sport, a key role of the coach is to identify the variables that have led to this fatigue, and to suggest alternative training programmes which promote a return to peak performance.

In ELT, after a heavy week's teaching workload, even the most passionate amongst us can sometimes struggle to find the enthusiasm to attend *more* classroom teaching, even if it is for our own good! Although the causes of this training apathy seem obvious, they are, in fact, more complex and nuanced than you might think. I came up with the (hopefully memorable) acronym *POTATOES* to capture some of the questions we need to ask ourselves about INSETT provision:

- **Predictability**. Is the training just 'more of the same'? Do the teachers think they know what they will learn before they even attend? Can they guess the format of the session simply by attending previous INSETTs?
- **Organisational context**. Does the training actually apply to the work the teachers are doing or will be expected to do in the immediate future? Is it relevant to them *now*, with their *current* students, at *this* point in the year and at *this* point in their careers?
- **Timing**. Do the teachers realistically have the time to commit to the planned training around their existing teaching schedules? What time of day does the training take place? Are the teachers likely to be hungry, tired – or both?

- **Autonomy**. Are the teachers consulted about the nature and content of their training? Is attendance compulsory or optional? If optional, what are the likely consequences of non-attendance (and are these known to the teachers)?
- **Training Overload**. Are the teachers simply getting *too much* training? Do they have enough time to implement in their classrooms what they are learning?
- **Expectations**. Do the teachers have realistic expectations of what the training will involve? Do they just want to be 'spoon-fed'? Does the training meet expectations of cognitive challenge and/or practicality?
- **Styles**. Does the training appeal to the teachers' different learning preferences?

If you recognise elements of training fatigue in your own teaching team, it's likely you have already asked yourself several of these questions. In my experience, reluctance or negativity towards training can often be improved with a little compromise and creative thinking on the part of the trainer. By putting teachers back at the centre of their own development, more creative, original and thought-provoking training paradigms are made possible. Here are three alternatives you might like to try.

1 Art exhibitions

Have you ever considered how you might capture and share some of the less 'visible' teacher activity in your schools? Take lesson planning, for example. Although the act of teaching itself is easily observable and, to some extent, qualitatively measurable, the planning process is both hidden and unseen. Unless they put pen to paper, the creative thought processes teachers go through to plan a lesson are invisible. Similarly, everyday teaching practices – like using the whiteboard, or providing feedback on the students' written work – are rarely witnessed by anyone other than the teacher actually doing them.

One way of sharing teachers' creativity in these areas is by providing a 'gallery' space to showcase their work. Like a regular art gallery, displays can take the form of 'exhibitions', with pieces of a similar theme or subject matter presented for a fixed period of time, at a given location (the teachers' room, a training room, a corridor or classroom). The experience can be contextualised further by promoting the exhibition widely via posters and flyers, and inviting school staff to an opening, where they can discuss the works with their colleagues over drinks and canapés!

While working in Egypt, I jointly organised an exhibition to celebrate the diversity of approaches to planning adopted in our teachers' rooms across the country. Over 20 lesson plans were collated and displayed, alongside a short gallery-style summary (provided by the 'teacher-artist') which described their planning process and how it had evolved over time. Artworks and artists were named, to allow the attendees to follow-up informally after the event, and several of the works provided talking points for weeks to come.

One of the great benefits of using exhibition spaces to present teachers' work visually is that it enables unseen innovative practices to be shared with others. Thought processes and ideas that might otherwise go unnoticed or under-appreciated are displayed in a way that celebrates their creative diversity. In our exhibition, rather than providing a top-down, 'one-size-fits-all' model of what a lesson plan should look like, the gallery highlighted the multiple ways that lesson planning can be approached, recorded and re-visited, be it on a messy scrap of paper, an annotated teacher's book or a carefully prepared flipchart. The flexibility of a room where visitors could just drop in at any time was also appreciated by the time-poor and those working off-site. Replicating the face-to-face exhibition online via the *Padlet* platform allowed us to share the event with teachers all over the country, and this is still accessible now at *padlet.com/egypt/artofplanning*.

Of course, there is a certain amount of preparation that must take place to ensure your gallery exhibition is a success. The process of curating the teachers' work in readiness for the exhibit shouldn't be underestimated. Motivating teachers to submit entries will involve more than just one hopeful 'all staff' email calling for volunteers. Approaching teachers one-on-one is more likely to develop trust and build project engagement. In your context, the space available to share the teachers' work may also be a limiting factor, but most schools have walls that can be used for this purpose. What could you display on yours?

2 Fairs

The most obvious way of making training more teacher-centred is to give the teachers themselves responsibility for leading INSETT sessions, but this can be problematic if your team don't yet have the confidence, experience or knowledge required. If this is true for your staff, assigning *them* the task of organising a training event is another option that will give prominence to their ideas, while also providing opportunities to develop leadership and project-management skills.

This strategy worked well within a university context, where my new team of 30 non-native-speaker teachers were demotivated by what they perceived as the repetitive nature of years of classroom-based INSETT. To re-ignite some enthusiasm for the teachers' own language studies, and to highlight the importance of autonomy in professional development, I set about organising a 'learner autonomy fair'. To assist with its organisation, I appointed two 'event managers' from the teaching team, who demonstrated clear leadership potential.

The concept was simple, and based on the typical roleplay mingle you might set up in the communicative language classroom. The teachers were divided into teams of four, and

asked to prepare a stand, from which they 'sold' ideas that had helped them learn a language (not necessarily English). On the day of the fair, group members then took turns to move around the fair, visiting the different stalls and 'buying' ideas. Each participant was given 100 paper dollars at the beginning and could choose how and where they wanted to spend them. The owners of the stall with the most money at the end were the winners.

Several factors contributed to the success of our fair, in which over 50 teachers took part (across three language departments) and hundreds of ideas were shared, from self-study apps to listening and reading techniques, subtitle programmes, and more. Providing a real sense of occasion, through decoration (eg bunting, stall signs and paper dollar notes), background music and ribbon cutting at the official opening, helped create a positive, festive atmosphere. The careful selection of project managers and their delegation of sub-tasks also afforded the teachers ownership and autonomy. The element of friendly competition further fostered staff bonding.

Although feedback on the day was very positive overall, one of the biggest challenges when holding a one-off training event like this is measuring any longer-term impact on development. You could ask your teachers to commit to implementing the ideas they have 'bought' over a 30-day period and recording reflections in a teaching journal, to evaluate changes in their practice. The ideas exchanged at your fairs also need not be limited to language learning tips. Whilst this was the focus of our own event, teachers could share advice on different ways to use a particular classroom resource – as a collaborative ideas exchange, the fair format has limitless potential.

3 Classroom clinics

A successful INSETT programme should address issues that are relevant to the attending teachers. It's often not academic management but the teachers themselves who have the best solutions. This is the thinking behind the 'Classroom clinic' – an informal, drop-in style training session for teachers to brainstorm solutions to current, real-life classroom problems.

Classroom clinics are a solutions-focused INSETT format which use the metaphor of a doctor's surgery to provide context and structure. Sessions begin with an examination – a purely descriptive open discussion of a real issue faced by one of the participating teachers. During this process, the other teachers (the 'doctors') ask questions to help them understand the situation better and reach a diagnosis. After the examination, the doctors re-group into twos and threes, and agree the best possible prescription. The 'teacher-patient' can ask for a second opinion from a different group of doctors if they wish. By the end of the clinic, they must accept one prescription (an idea, activity or technique) to apply in their classroom. A weekly check-up at the next clinic allows the teachers to give feedback on their progress.

Of the three alternative formats suggested here, classroom clinics are probably the most straightforward. Requiring almost no preparation time and resources, once up and running they can be almost entirely teacher-led. Clinic sessions are an improvement on trainer-led INSETT in that they focus wholly on real-life classroom dilemmas and are context-specific in

nature. Highlighting the importance of the Hippocratic Oath and 'doctor–patient confidentiality' (the problems discussed must stay in the room) is important, in order to foster a confidential, supportive environment in which the teachers feel able to make themselves vulnerable, and discuss personal challenges openly, without judgement by their peers.

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The traditional INSETT format definitely still has its place in professional development, and I am not proposing never delivering another INSETT session again! Over the long term, though, there is a limit to what trainer-centred modes of delivery can achieve in terms of teacher development, not to mention the detrimental impact that 'spoon-feeding' teachers can have upon attitudes towards both professional development and language learning. Faced with the challenge of motivating teams of teachers in the past, I have found a bottom-up approach to training, which harnesses the teachers' existing knowledge and skill-sets and provides them with opportunities to develop beyond their own classrooms, to be a much better way forward.

Transforming traditional training sessions into more immersive, collaborative training experiences does not come without its challenges, however – lack of time, money and resources being just a few. For me, though, the renewed teacher engagement and team-bonding that these projects have generated have made them worth the time and energy I have invested in them as a trainer. So why not turn things around and hand over the board pens and clicker for a change? Convert your training room into an art gallery, fairground or doctor's clinic for a day, and discover how a new paradigm can surprise, inspire and promote creative problem-solving among your own teachers. ■

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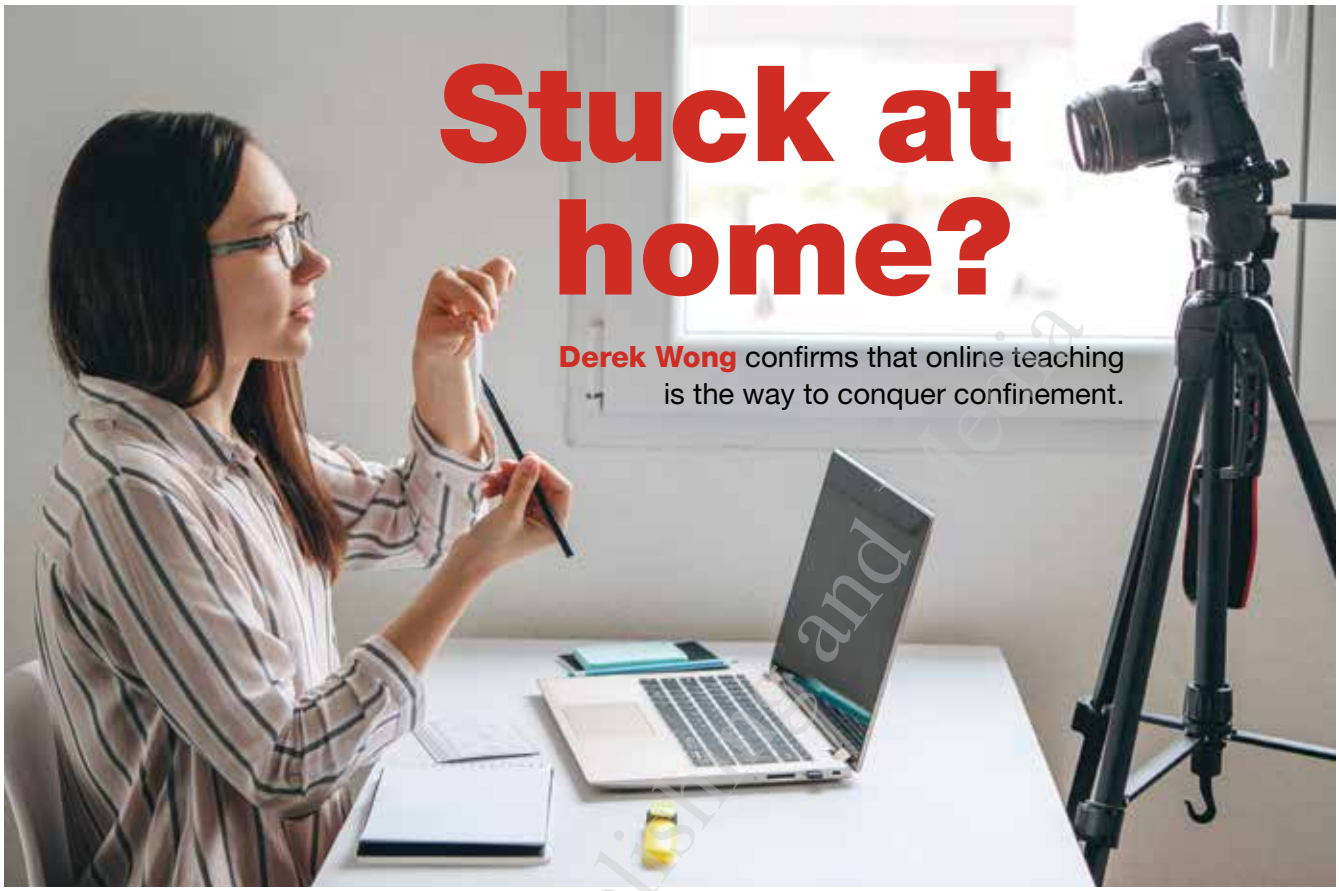

Stuck at home?

Derek Wong confirms that online teaching is the way to conquer confinement.

Here in Hong Kong, school has been suspended because of the recent coronavirus outbreak. As a result, we teachers are stuck at home – but we still have to teach. So what happens? Online teaching!

This year, I'm teaching three junior secondary classes, each with around 15–20 students aged 12–15. I happened to be using *Microsoft Teams* with my students for the last two years, so naturally I decided to continue using it as the main platform for my lessons throughout the Covid-19 class suspension.

Our school decided that we would have live lessons to compensate for face-to-face teaching, and that these live lessons were to follow the typical school timetable. In other words, the students are expected to come online at designated time slots to 'be in class'. In these lessons, we are to adhere to our syllabus, though different teachers may have slightly different modes of teaching.

I, personally, insist on showing my own face on screen (and, according to most of the students, this does help them engage and get a sense that I am with them), though the students can choose whether or not to turn their cameras on: the main concern here is privacy, but in addition, when teaching online, it is hard to be screen sharing (ie showing a whiteboard screen, a word document, a *PowerPoint* slideshow or a video on my laptop screen for the students to view in class) while also looking at the students. Besides, *Microsoft Teams* only allows four participants to be 'shown' on screen, so I wouldn't be able to see the whole class anyway.

One problem that I had at first was an obvious drop in interaction: we were not in a physical classroom, and the students could 'hide' behind their screens and avoid questions. Apart from eliciting responses and marking their assignments, it seemed as though I could not check on their progress. At times, even though I was teaching live, I almost felt as if I was talking to myself, my camera or a wall, instead of teaching my students. Then came my inspiration to think more carefully about each class: How could I motivate my students? How could I support them better? And how could I teach better?

In this article, I will outline some ideas for what I feel are the necessary steps to plan for online teaching.

Using an LMS

Don't fret if you don't know what an LMS (Learning Management System) is. Essentially, it's just a go-to hub for all the students, an e-learning

platform that you can use to connect everything online. Some may argue that a full LMS is not needed, but a go-to platform for all your students will make everything more centralised and hence easier to access and retrieve.

As mentioned above, in my classrooms, I tend to use *Microsoft Teams*. This is mainly because its direct messaging function allows my students to find me at any time, even outside class, without me giving them my mobile phone or *Whatsapp* number. However, there are a multitude of other alternatives, such as *Blackboard*, *Moodle*, *Socrative*, *Google Classroom*, *Canvas*, *OneNote*, etc, which offer a host of other benefits. The choice here depends first on your school's policy (some schools may already have a centralised LMS which is used for all subjects; some may not want their students to have contact with teachers outside school hours, etc), and then on individual classroom contexts. Most LMSs have homework submission tabs which make it easy for teachers to read and comment on student work. Note that some systems even allow you to design a learning pathway, ie if the students get a pass score in task A, they progress to task B; if they don't, they have to repeat. Depending on the needs of the class and how the curriculum is laid out, you might want to consider using an LMS with this function.

It is worth comparing the different LMSs (free and paid) before coming up with one that really suits your teaching context. However, an important point to mention is that there is a *learning curve*: it may be hard for you to learn to use a new application for teaching – and the students have to learn how to work with it as well. Also, if you are to use an LMS, you should not suddenly change it during the semester.

Decisions about content

After you have chosen an LMS, the next thing to consider is what you are going to teach online. Online teaching is, after all, very different from face-to-face teaching. In face-to-face teaching, you get to see the reactions of the students first-hand, but in online teaching, everything has to be written or in the form of videos. The flexibility of allowing the students to work at their own pace can be offset by the disadvantages of the students getting too *much* or too *little* support for their learning.

Hence, there is a need to be very careful about what material you put online, and how much. There are several questions that need to be addressed:

- Are you going to deliver the lessons daily, once every few days or once a week?
- How much time will the students be required to spend on each lesson?
- Are the materials too hard, too simple or at just about the right level to challenge them?
- Are the lessons connected, ensuring a progressive development of knowledge and skills?
- What scaffolding do you need, to ensure that the students get sufficient help and guidance to work through the materials?

One strength of online teaching is that differentiation can be achieved quite easily. An LMS like *Canvas* allows the separate grouping of students in each lesson or learning block; and even if your LMS does not support grouping, you can upload multiple versions of a worksheet to cater for diversity in a class. That being said, online teaching allows a wide range of lesson delivery and assessment methods, and we will look into these in the next section.

Method of delivery

Once you have made your decisions on the LMS and the materials you are going to use, the next thing you will need to consider is how you want to deliver your online lessons. Here are some suggestions:

1 Live teaching and/or discussion sessions

If you decide to do 'live teaching', *Microsoft Teams*, *Facebook*, *Zoom*, *Google Hangouts* and *Skype* are among the many choices that allow the whole class to be online at the same time for a lesson or a simple chat. However, a core concern is the number of participants. How many students can be shown on screen at the same time (or do we even need to see them)? *Google Hangouts* accommodates 25 students for 'education' accounts, *Microsoft Teams* a more generous 250, but with a maximum of four participants displayed on the screen, and *Zoom* allows a maximum of 100 participants by default, while allowing 49 participants to be displayed on a screen. This may account for the boom in *Zoom* use by teachers in the present crisis.

Participant numbers aside, we may also have to consider the other functions that each platform has. Depending on the needs of the class, teachers may want:

- a 'share screen' option in which the teacher (or any participant) can share their screens for presentations;
- the facility to record meetings (ie lessons) – currently available on most platforms;

- a 'raise hand' function which alerts the presenter (teacher) to the fact that participants (students) wish to ask questions, without having the presenter's speech interrupted. (My understanding is that only *Zoom* has this at the moment, though it was announced earlier this year that this feature was being developed for *Microsoft Teams*.)

An obvious benefit of 'live teaching' is the interaction that it allows. In addition to eliciting student responses verbally, you can make use of instant polls and questionnaires. Some platforms have embedded tools or widgets that allow this – for example, the incorporation of 'Polly' in *Microsoft Teams* was a function that I exploited to such an extent that my students started joking that one day Polly – which has a bird as its icon – would go on strike. Of course, using other real-time quiz software like *Mentimeter* (I particularly like using its word cloud function for brainstorming) or *Kahoot!* is also possible.

However, there may still be some problems with live lessons, especially if the students are in different time zones, which has happened in my case. Some of my students went overseas at the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, putting them in a completely different time zone. One option was to record my lessons, but I did not find it practical to record one-hour lessons with all teacher–student and student–student discussions included. So I put all my spoken instructions (just as I would say them out loud) onto whatever task sheet I prepared – just so any student who happened to miss my instructions or could not be in class could still catch up.

Another problem relates to hardware support. It is not difficult to help students get used to devices or software that are used for live teaching – what's sometimes impossible to deal with is network connectivity issues and data usage. When WiFi breaks down, or if a family simply does not have sufficient data allowance for live lessons, it becomes impractical to do live teaching every day. This may be a concern for many teachers considering whether it is an option for their classes.

Of course, the frequency of live lessons is also worth considering – is it necessary to meet the students daily, or will weekly or fortnightly lessons suffice? This, of course, depends on individual classroom needs and contexts.

2 Pre-recording videos

Shooting and editing language-learning videos, and making use of existing resources for instruction, can be a great supplement or alternative to live teaching. Teachers can record themselves teaching: *PowerPoint* has a 'record slide show' function; *Quicktime Player* also has a screen-recording feature; *Windows 10* has a built-in

screen-recording function that is accessible via the 'games bar' that can be found in the 'start' menu; and for Macs, the controls for video or screen capture are available via the Shift–Command (⌘)–5 shortcut. Of course, using an actual camera is also an alternative. In terms of video uploading, *Edpuzzle* is a good platform which allows teachers to upload videos of themselves teaching or videos taken from *YouTube*. Questions and extra notes can be added via the *Edpuzzle* platform to supplement teaching. Alternatively, teachers can make use of cloud storage (*Google Drive*, *Microsoft OneDrive*, *Dropbox*, etc) for video uploading – videos can be shared with students using a generated link from these systems.

These videos can be followed up with live sessions with discussion activities (following the flipped classroom approach), or they can serve as the main teaching tool themselves – covering the necessary lesson content. Understanding can be checked through online forms (*Google Forms*, *Microsoft Forms*, *SurveyMonkey*, *Kahoot!* etc) or tasks. Students who have questions can contact the teacher either through email or any other communication software.

3 Discussion forums

For extended discussions outside class, collaboration opportunities or written responses to tasks, discussion forums can be used. In discussion forums, responses are commonly typewritten instead of verbal, and discussions typically take place over a period of time online. While this takes away the possibility for immediate feedback and responses from authentic discussions, which is available in live lessons, it can break the barriers of time, meaning that the discussion can be prolonged until after normal lesson hours, and that even students who do not have live lessons can discuss with their classmates. Various LMSs allow this, with examples being the reply boxes on *Microsoft Teams* and *Google Classroom*, and *Microsoft SharePoint*'s 'discussion forum' tab. If your LMS does not allow for this, the comment function on social media tools like *Instagram* and *Facebook* also works in the same way. Whether or not you take part in the discussion yourself as a participant, support it as a facilitator or simply observe it will be a choice you have to make, depending on student activity and response.

4 Interactive worksheets

Worksheets can be made a lot less boring by digitalising them and combining them with video, audio and images. *Google Forms*, *Microsoft Forms* and *Wizer.me* are good starting points for making free interactive worksheets (which can be shared with a simple link). Also, you could consider shortening the web link using a website shortener (eg *bit.ly*) to avoid cumbersome URLs.

However, the main problem with worksheets is that they are too 'formal' at times, and I would argue that using these tools doesn't really make worksheets any different. Students still get task after task, question after question, so here are some alternatives:

- ***Kahoot!*:** Students can do (or design their own) *Kahoot!* quizzes for homework. (*Kahoot!* has a 'challenge' function that can make a quiz suitable as individual homework.) For some reason, my younger students find *Kahoot!* quizzes interesting no matter how many times they do them.
- ***Gimkit*:** This is my personal favourite and is more fun than *Kahoot!* Its 'homework' function allows the students to repeat a bank of questions non-stop till they reach the goal of a certain total score (gained through answering questions correctly). This is just like drilling, but in a more fun way.
- ***Quizlet*:** The students can collaborate to make vocabulary banks (though this is quite a boring activity).
- ***PowerPoint*:** Instead of getting them to fill in worksheets, you can ask your students to produce *PowerPoint* presentations, and even record themselves presenting the slides, submitting them as coursework.
- ***Google Sites*, *Wix* and other website makers:** The students can keep a blog on their own for use as a portfolio of their learning, giving an alternative form of assessment.

Of course, this is not a Bible of teaching methods. There are many other alternatives not included here, and the ideas can be combined and adjusted for your classroom.

Engagement is also an issue that must be considered much more carefully – it's hard to know whether or not the students actually participate in class; instead of asking them to show their faces on camera and forcing them to complete worksheet after worksheet, we can consider alternative delivery and assessment modes and actually enjoy exploring these with the students, seeing which works best with them. Nonetheless, one common pitfall is including *too many* different delivery and assessment modes in one lesson, or one course. Apart from facing the learning curve issue for dealing with an LMS, the students may also get confused and tired when required to learn new methods and understand the standards required.

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All in all, while online teaching brings a challenge to teachers, it also provides a lot of opportunities that can supplement face-to-face instruction or replace it when adverse situations, not only viruses, strike. Nonetheless, the multitude of choices that are available requires teachers to consider their individual teaching contexts very carefully before deciding on a central platform, a method of teaching, and the content that the students learn online. ■

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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 considers the use of personal data.

Five things you always wanted to know about

data literacy

(but were too afraid to ask)

1 What is data literacy?

Data literacy is an important area within digital literacies. Data literacy means being able to analyse, evaluate and work with large sets of data. Data do not only consist of numbers (numerical data); they may be multimodal, consisting of images, text, video, audio – and any combination of these.

2 What are the issues around data literacy?

Our mobile devices and wearable technologies, such as smartwatches and fitness trackers (devices that count our steps and/or measure our heartbeat), generate huge amounts of data about our daily habits or our personal wellbeing. Who has access to these data, and what is done with them, is one of the important ethical questions of our time. Thus data literacy includes not just knowing what data are, and what they can mean, but also how we can protect our data.

3 What has data literacy got to do with English language learning?

As educational technologies are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning, large amounts of learning data are generated. For example, if your students use an LMS (Learning Management System, also referred to as a VLE – Virtual Learning Environment) and carry out some of their English language learning online, fairly detailed data about their behaviour will be generated by the LMS. These data can include exactly when they logged in or out of the LMS, how long they spent online, exactly what activities and resources they viewed or completed, how many forum posts they made, their test scores and how many attempts they made to complete the test, and so on. These kinds of learning analytics have been available for several decades, through platforms such as *Moodle* and *Blackboard*, among others. Looking at these LMS data can help a teacher make inferences about how motivated or engaged a student is, and flag up any students who are falling behind, or scoring low grades.

4 What other data can an LMS generate?

With increased computing power and increasingly complex algorithms that analyse behaviour, we see the advent of 'emotion analysis', where a student's feelings or emotions can be analysed via facial recognition software while they are carrying out a learning task online. In theory, emotion analysis can reveal, through their facial expression, whether a student is (for example) bored, frustrated or engaged by an online activity or resource. However, whether a certain expression really conveys an emotion is contentious, and much research calls into question the accuracy of emotion analysis. As psychologists are quick to point out, we don't necessary frown only when we are angry, or smile only when we are happy: we tend to use a range of facial expressions to convey emotion, and each individual is unique. In short, the mapping of emotion to facial expression is complex, and claims by educational technology vendors that emotion analysis will improve student tracking and prevent academic failure need to be treated critically.

5 How can I bring data literacy into the language classroom?

Raising your students' awareness about the importance of protecting one's personal data is a good first step. You could ask your students to think about precisely what personal data their phones or wearable devices produce, and who exactly has access to these data, apart from themselves. Put your students into groups and ask them to research how they can protect their own personal data, and to share their findings in their groups and then with the class. Another activity involves the students in learning how to analyse data sets, for example from a fitness tracker. You can find anonymous examples of fitness tracker data online, and ask the students to analyse these in small groups. Finally, if you use an LMS with your students, share what data are generated about them in the LMS, and what you/your institution does with these data. Your students may be surprised to learn just how detailed the data from an LMS are – and they may not be entirely happy with this, unless it is clearly explained how and why the data are used. As data literate teachers, we need to ensure that our students are *also* data literate; this includes them being well-informed about what *we* do with *their* learning data! ■

Nicky Hockly has been involved in EFL teaching and teacher training since 1987. She 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. Her company The Consultants-E (*www.theconsultants-e.com*) offers online educational technology training courses for English language teachers.

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Webwatcher

Russell Stannard finds that the whole world is *Zoom*ing.

It is funny how a single technology has emerged as the one that many institutions have adopted for dealing with the live component of their online lesssons. I have been using 'webinar' or 'virtual classroom' tools for many years. My favourite is *Adobe Connect*, but this is quite expensive, so the one I use for my own webinars is *ClickMeeting*, which has a super-clear and easy-to-use interface. However, the world seems to have adopted *Zoom*, so over the last three weeks, I have had to swap tools and learn to use *Zoom* as quickly as possible. It's not a bad tool. The breakout rooms (see the following section) are very well designed, and the way it plays video also works well (as long as you remember to share your sound with the students) but, to my mind, it has way too many settings.

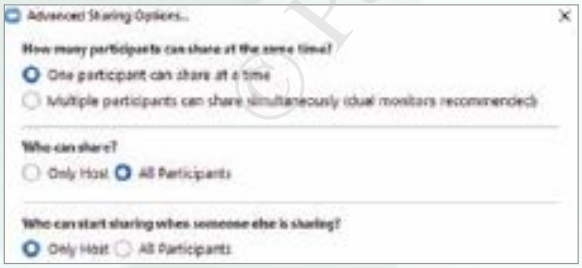
In this article, I will try to highlight some of the key settings you need to be aware of when using *Zoom*. Some of these are absolutely vital. I have also provided help videos (see below) that cover things like settings, breakout rooms, screen sharing, etc in more detail. *Zoom* has made recent changes to its security, but make sure you always use a password and never share the *Zoom* URL publicly.

Breakout rooms

Breakout rooms are sessions that are split off from the main *Zoom* meeting (rather like groupwork in face-to-face classes). If you want to use breakout rooms, you have to set them up first. Go into your account and click on 'Settings' on the left. You have to scroll down quite a long way, but the first option when you come to the 'In Meeting (Advanced)' settings section is 'Breakout room' and you need to turn that option on.

Screen sharing

The person who set up the meeting (the teacher) can always screen share, but it is often necessary for the students to screen share too. For example, students in breakout rooms really need to screen share: otherwise, all they can do is see each other via their webcams and talk. If you allow them to screen share, they can show each other documents, websites, etc. The screen-share options can be activated when you are presenting. Just click on the tab next to 'Screen share' and then choose 'Advanced Sharing Options'. You will see this window:



With the chosen settings shown in this window, only one student in each breakout room will be able to share their screen at any one time. All the participants will be able to share when their turn comes, but only the host can start sharing when someone else is sharing. This means that the students cannot intervene when other students are screen sharing.

Annotations

It is possible to allow the students to annotate – a useful feature when they are working in breakout rooms. It can also be useful if you are sharing a *PowerPoint* slide or working with an IWB. You need to switch this option on before you start. It is quite a long way down the list under 'Settings', in the 'In Meeting (Basic)' section of the list.

Audio and video

Using audio and video is quite confusing in *Zoom*, but here are a few tips:

Unless you have a super-fast internet connection, you are likely to have problems with bandwidth when running *Zoom*. My advice is to let the students have the audio and video on when they start: that way, they get the feeling that they are in a class. Once you start the lesson, you can mute the students and turn off their webcams.

The webcams have a big impact on how much data is being passed through the internet, and audio is about control. There are many different ways to control the audio and webcams, but the easiest is to choose 'Mute all the audio' (on the right in the participants list). You can see if the students have their webcams on in the participants list and you can just click on them to turn them off. The students can now only communicate with you by using the chat or by you turning on their audio individually. The students can raise their hands if they want to talk, and you are then able to turn on their audio. Don't forget, though, that if you put the students into breakout rooms, you really do need to turn their audio on. Webcams can also help when in the breakout rooms, but it does depend on bandwidth.

Being prepared

Many teachers are confused about how the screen-share option works. You can share anything you have open on your computer (eg a document, *PowerPoint* or video), but remember to open it before you start your *Zoom* session. When you screen share, the tab for each open item will be clearly highlighted in the screen-share options: you click on the tab to share that item.

One really important tip: Make sure you click on 'Share computer sound'. This can be found at the bottom left-hand corner when you click on 'Share screen'. This option means that whatever sound is playing on your computer is also played on the computers of your participants. ■

I have prepared a series of videos to help you with many aspects of *Zoom*. You can see these at *www.teachertrainingvideos.com/Zoom*. For a further video on security issues, see *www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzYWrkCD1uY&feature=youtu.be*.

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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 agile learning – and teaching.

Javier was going to an English language school two evenings a week. He knew that English is very important these days and that he might need it some day for his job. In every lesson, his teacher, Sara, started with a warmer that usually involved them playing some kind of word game. After a grammar presentation and some grammar practice, she would then teach them a set of vocabulary, and Javier would find himself remembering two or three words from the set of 15. He would try to memorise the language just in case he needed it one day, but he knew that if he should forget, he only had to refer to his coursebook and his notes. Javier was doing what we call 'just-in-case' learning.

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One day, Javier got a promotion and found himself on an international project that used English as the medium of communication. He now needed the language to build relationships, voice his opinions and influence his colleagues, and he needed it there and then. He needed to do some 'just-in-time' learning. So he went to Sara for extra help in these areas, but she told him that the class wouldn't be learning to agree or disagree until the next term, and that they would only be doing 'social English' when they got to upper-intermediate level.

When Javier questioned Sara's ability to be flexible, she simply replied: *'We follow a course with a fixed structure here, and all the students like knowing what to expect for the year ahead. Changing things around would cause too much disruption to everyone.'*

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Javier was left feeling lost, and panicked. After a couple of virtual meetings, where he felt totally out of his depth, his confidence took a huge knock and he found himself questioning all the 'just-in-case' language learning he had spent years doing beforehand.

Meanwhile, Sara was experiencing something similar, almost in parallel to Javier. She had been teaching face-to-face language classes for ten years. She knew that e-learning was very important these days and she thought she might consider teaching online some day. But there seemed to be a great deal to learn and to plan before she could embark on any online teaching. So she parked that thought at the back of her mind. Occasionally, she would come across a social media post or blog by a fellow teacher on online teaching, and she would skim it quickly, just in case she needed that knowledge one day.

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One day, because of a global crisis or some seemingly improbable circumstance, Sara's school had to stop all face-to-face training, and she was forced to move all her classes online. The sudden changes left Sara feeling lost and vulnerable. When she tried to search for tips on online teaching, she found herself bombarded by suggestions of dozens of apps and platforms, and the enormity of the undertaking just seemed too much to bear.

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Both Javier and Sara were used to a form of learning and working that was carefully structured and planned ahead of time. And this would be similar to the way businesses ran their projects perhaps a generation ago. Teams developing a product would typically identify a problem and then plan a solution. This plan was often fixed, and changes or additions along the way were not often tolerated.

But in the last couple of decades, the idea of *agile working* has been gaining popularity among many corporations. This new way of working is all about responding to change, as opposed to following a plan; prioritising people over processes. In a world where things are constantly in flux, project requirements can change at any point. Stubbornly sticking to how you've always done things could result in missed opportunities for improvement and an outdated product that fails to fulfil current needs.

Soon, the concept of *agile learning* was born. Taking on the main tenets of agile working, agile learning is about a flexible learning process that responds to what is happening in the real world. Here, the learning content can be changed and added to when necessary; classroom tasks mirror tasks in the real world; learners aim for short-term personal learning goals; there is a focus on collaborative learning; and a lot of learning is self-directed, with the support of coaches/trainers.

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In an unpredictable time, where we are forced to adapt to massive changes in a 'sink-or-swim' way, agile working and learning is becoming all the more relevant. We need to adopt a process that adapts to regular changes and that prioritises our students/teachers over a structure or system that requires conformity. We need to embrace learning goals that reflect the needs and interests of our students, and help them with language areas and communication skills that will actually have an impact on their real-life interactions in English. We need to move from being knowledge-givers to facilitators who motivate our students to use the language and encourage them to find their own path.

In the current world health crisis, we are perhaps best placed to understand the need for such an approach. We should no longer rest on our laurels, delivering the same lesson on the three conditionals every term. We need to teach in a way that is agile, flexible and adaptable. And there's no better time than now.

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