

The **bel**ta Bulletin

Spring 2014 Edition 1

In this edition...

Marjorie Rosenberg on Learning Styles

Maria Araxi Sachpazian on Interaction Patterns

Introducing... #ELTpics



Dimitris Primalis Sophia Mavridi Malu Sciamarelli

Eugenia Loras Roseli Serra Pete Rutherford and Rob Szabo

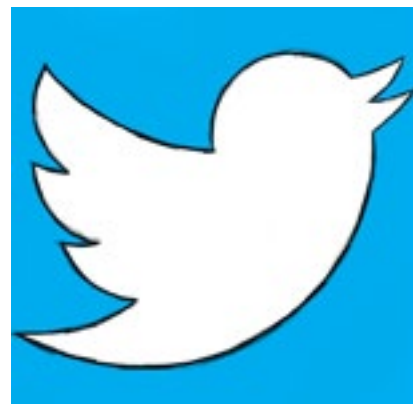
Rose Bard Vedrana Estatiev-Vojkovic Malou Van Loon

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A Message from the Editor

Welcome to you all!

Here at BELTA Bulletin, we are delighted to welcome you to our first online BELTA Bulletin, which has been in the works for a few months now! We are so excited it has come true.

It is a huge honour for me as the Editorial Officer of BELTA and the Editor of the BELTA Bulletin to have been trusted by everyone here to set forward this new venture. I have been so fortunate to work with so many amazing people at BELTA.

Thank you to BELTA

A very big thank you to our President, James Taylor and to our Co-President, Mieke Kenis for all their support. Thank you also goes to all of the BELTA team: Jurgen Basstanie, John Arnold, Krishnan Coenen and Ellen DePreter for their support in all this.

Our writers

We are excited to present our writers, who are from all over the globe. A great big welcome to them all and thank you for their contributions! We have two main articles by Marjorie Rosenberg and Maria Araxi Sachpazian. We will be having a regular column, Mea Culpa, by Dimitris Primalis. Articles by Sophia Mavridi, Malu Sciamarelli, Eugenia Loras, Roseli Serra, Pete Rutherford and Rob Szabo, Rose Bard, Vedrana Estatiev-Vojkovic, and Malou Van Loon.

An Amazing Editorial Assistant for this Issue

I would also like to show my appreciation and thank Malou Van Loon, ELT Student at Thomas More, who did a tremendous job at editing with me in this issue, as part of her internship. Malou has also contributed an article to this issue!

A Collaboration

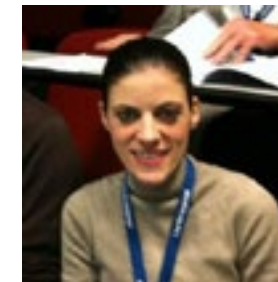
At BELTA, we are all about collaboration. ELTA, the English Language Teachers' Association of Serbia and Newsletter Editors, have offered to contribute a lesson plan or article for every issue. Thank you so much, ELTA and Olivera Catic for this first collaboration, and Maja Jerkovic for sending us the materials!

Keeping in Touch

We would like to keep all communication channels with you, our readers, open. Let us know if you have any questions or comments, and feel free to contribute yourselves!

You can contact me via email:
vickyloras@lorasnetwork.com

Thank you to you all!



Vicky Loras (BELTA Bulletin Editorial Office)



A Word From The President

James Taylor

Dear BELTA members,

I am delighted to welcome you to the first edition of the BELTA Bulletin, our new journal for members. This is next stage in our plan to give BELTA our members access to the best professional development opportunities we can offer.

I would like to thank the Editor Vicky and her assistant Malou for putting together this opening issue. They have have worked tirelessly to curate a fascinating collection of articles from around the world that we are sure will inspire and fascinate you.

I would also like to thank the ELTpics team for giving us access to their archive. All the pictures you see in this issue are available

to you to use in your classroom, without any copyright issues. To find out more, read Mieke Kenis's article on the following page.

So far at BELTA we have organised nine webinars, had a series of fascinating articles from global educators on our blog and hosted two national conferences, the second of which took place in Brussels in March. This is alongside our newsletters, regularly updated social media pages and our involvement in the ELT scene in Belgium, attending various events including De Taaldag in Antwerp in February and The European Day of Languages in Brussels back in September. We have also updated our website, and will soon be opening our members-

only area, another benefit we are sure you will enjoy.

But we are always open to more ideas. If there is something you would like from us, then please let us know. You can email me directly at president@beltabelgium.com to share your ideas, and if you would like to get more involved with BELTA, then I would love to hear from you too.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural edition of the BELTA Bulletin, and everything that BELTA has to offer.

Best wishes,

James



Emotions, animals and food, just three of the ELTpics sets

An Introduction to ELTpics

Mieke Kenis (BELTA Co-President)

A picture says a thousand words...

Using pictures in teaching languages has probably been around for as long as people have been learning and teaching languages. From simply showing a picture of an object to teach the word for it in the target language, to using pictures to stimulate creative writing or illustrate a grammar point, pictures speak a universal language and pictures motivate students.

Teachers are often on the lookout for very specific pictures. You know how you can spend, waste, hours searching the internet for a picture, which is then mostly covered by ordinary copyright restrictions, which can be very limiting for teachers.

In 2010, some ELT teachers started sharing their own pictures on Twitter, which they could then use with their students. Soon afterwards, the idea of ELTPICS was born. They decided to start an online collection of pictures for use by teachers. The pictures are sent in by primarily ELT teachers from around the world on the ELTPICS Facebook page or via Twitter, using the hashtag #eltpics.

These photos are then uploaded by the curators into thematic sets, and are available free from copyright for non-commercial use by teachers. There are 100 sets at the moment from Animals to Working Week, containing almost 17,000 pictures.

I love ELTPICS and I have experienced how easy it is to contribute by sending in my own pictures to ELTPICS and how great it is to be able to use ELTPICS in my classes. It was an honour to be asked to help in curating the collection and a privilege to upload so many lovely pictures from teachers worldwide.

All information about ELTPICS can be found at eltpics.com and we invite you to take a look at the wonderful ELTPICS collection.

BELTA is very grateful we can use ELTPICS photos for our Bulletin. Maybe the next one will be taken by you ?

Why did I go to the BELTA Day? – A Report

Ana Elisa Miranda

Why did I go to BELTA Day?

Why do experienced teachers, authors and trainers still attend ELT events? Haven't we studied enough? Don't we know everything we need?

No, we don't. We can always learn something new.

You will certainly meet a teacher who works in a different environment than you, who uses a different approach or technique or who knows of opportunities you don't.

"Sure I learned lots of things during the BELTA day. What first comes to my mind are the online teaching opportunities for teachers at Joanna's session. But also the whole revolutionary concept of giving our learners time to practice the language beyond course books, materials and other constraints in Luke Medding's presentation." *Anna Varna, Pedagogical Advisor, Brussels*

You will hear speakers presenting revolutionary or at least thought-provoking ideas.

Jeremy Harmer introduced us to Sugata Mitra and The hole in the wall experiment and the concept of SOLEs (Self-Organized Learning Environment). Simply put, Sugata Mitra and his team

put a computer in a wall in a slum in New Delhi and soon the children started playing around with it, figuring out what to do and teaching the others. He defends the idea that children don't need teachers, they learn as a group. He also says that we don't need to remember much anymore, everything you need to know is available on the internet.

I agree that we are able to learn things ourselves and pass it on to others, but there are things that only a teacher can do.

Just as I was thinking that, Jeremy mentioned a passage from a book where a couple of those things are listed: a teacher can guide and motivate, target weaknesses and pinpoint errors, impose structure and so on. That reminded me of my conversation students: most of them learn Portuguese on their own using online resources. However, they come to a point where they do need a teacher in order to improve. They need corrections and guidance, they need clarifications that they can't find in their materials, they need a certain structure and strategies.

We can't be replaced by machines yet.

Later in the day, Luke Meddings spoke about Dogme. Dogme is a teaching approach that is all about relying less on materials and lesson plans. I know that in most situations this wouldn't be possible but for private conversation lessons, for example, this is perfect! More spontaneity, more interaction, more flexibility. You have to be a confident and resourceful teacher, though. And of course that doesn't mean you won't prepare for class – it just means you're not a slave to the schedule and that you won't cut your student off because you have to finish that page.

Two of my favourite workshops were about online teaching. I am still amazed at how some of the topics chosen for BELTA Day resonate with what I've been doing and thinking lately. I left the event full of thoughts involving online teaching, conversation classes, Dogme and where to look for jobs.

And that's why we go to events like BELTA Day: to learn unexpected things from each other and to get that boost of motivation we all need from time to time.

"First of all, having been an English and Dutch teacher for more than thirty years in several schools and universities, I was very



impressed by the perfect organization of this Belta day: not a single minute was wasted.

Mixing tutors, teacher trainers, publishers and candidate teachers turned out to be a big success. There were participants from all over the world and on 22 March I was told by several non European teachers they felt slightly discriminated in Europe. Nowadays it is hard to become an English teacher in Europe, even in Brussels, if you are not a native speaker and non European. I wasn't conscious of this before.

Although I have been teaching for about thirty seven years, I had the feeling of still learning a lot in one single day. The workshops tackled practical exercises: reading easy books to give pupils and students the incentive to start reading and loving the English language and imagining original exercises with songs for instance. This week, I already

had the opportunity to use some ideas I discovered in some British publishers' files and flyers as well.

To conclude I need to say I had a feeling of well-being and satisfaction when I left the sixth floor of the HUB. This Belta Day resulted in an email to colleagues and direction to recommend the English teachers association and it eventually enthused my tuition all week. No doubt, I will come back." *Marianne Vincent, teacher, Brussels.*

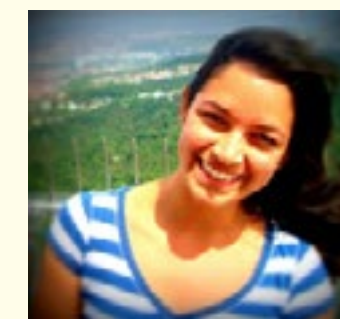
"This year's BELTA Day was another great opportunity to get better acquainted with the ELT community in Belgium, hear some excellent, thought-provoking talks, as well as meet and exchange opinions and impressions with other ELT professionals. I especially enjoyed Jeremy Harmer's plenary session, which reminded everyone why teachers are necessary (if there ever was any doubt!), and Nerina Conti's talk on

storytelling techniques called "Once upon a classroom...and they spoke English happily ever after", because I always love seeing an effective demonstration of how to use

Cuisenaire rods in class. The other talks I attended were very good too, but commenting on all of them would mean writing a whole blog post!" *Vedrana Vojkovic Estatiev, online ELT instructor, Brussels.*

This article was originally posted the BELTA website .

About Ana Elisa



Ana Elisa, originally from Brazil, currently lives in Belgium. She is a teacher, writer, blogger, and translator. She blogs at www.anaelismiranda.com.

The BELTA Day 2014 In Pictures

Photos by James Taylor, Amelie Van Den Broeck, and Filip Van De Velde.



Previous page, clockwise from top left: Luke Meddings during his plenary, volunteers at the registration desk, the attentive audience, a lucky raffle winner, some serious note taking, the sponsors area.

This page, clockwise from top left: BELTA President James Taylor with plenary speaker Jeremy Harmer, BELTA member Vedrana Vojkovic Estatiev during her talk, another BELTA member Eef Lenaers presenting, exchanging ideas in the swapshop, Divya Madhavan and her talk on critical pedagogy, Student Selection speakers Valerie Van den Broeck & Elodie Delhomme.



Learning Styles

Marjorie Rosenberg

How my journey began

It is always interesting to discuss the concept of learning styles with educators. Although research has been carried out over the last fifty years or so, it is still considered by some to be controversial. Those who feel that learning styles do not exist or have a place in the classroom can point to a wide variety of websites and scholarly articles while proponents of learning styles can also find a large number of journal articles and research results attesting to the validity of the theories.

My interest in this field began in the early 1990s in a course on 'superlearning' techniques, where I heard about visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners for the first time. It was as if a door

(had) opened for me and I finally understood why my years of trying to learn French through the audio-lingual method had been so resoundingly unsuccessful. As a visual and kinaesthetic learner, being told 'not to picture the words in my head' was the wrong way for me to be confronted with a language for the first time. Just listening to the sounds and finding automatic responses or sitting in a language lab with nothing to look at did not help me at all.

Years later, when I learned German, I wrote words down myself, carried a dictionary around to look words up and made use of a number of visual aids. This method was certainly more rewarding for me and

suddenly finding out what the difference was between the two experiences began my journey into this fascinating area. As a language teacher I became very interested in finding out how I could help my learners to have positive experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Discovering and developing different possibilities of doing this became a mission.

Definitions

As one of the first questions which (that) comes to mind refers to the definition of 'styles', it seems best to quote some of the experts in the field:

- Guild and Garger (1998) say 'The way we perceive the world governs how we think, make judgments and form values about experiences and people. This unique aspect of our humanness is what we call "style".'
- Keefe (1979) contends that styles are 'characteristic cognitive, affective and psychological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment'
- Kinsella (1995) comments that 'learning style refers to an individual's natural, habitual and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills which persists regardless of teaching methods of content area.'
- Dunn and Dunn (1992, 1993) (and Dunn, Dunn, and Perrin

(1994)) say that 'learning style is the way each person begins to concentrate on, process, internalize and retain new and difficult academic information.' They go on to suggest that 'More than three-fifths of learning style is biological; less than one-fifth is developmental.'

Importance in learning

Moving on to the importance and use of learning styles in learning is a subject which inspires debate from all corners of the globe and from people involved in a variety of educational situations. It is often argued that it is not possible to adapt instructions to every learner and even in cases where this is done, it has no particular effect on the learning outcome. While this may be true, it is only one part of the equation. However, 'it is possible to strive for uniform outcomes but to intentionally diversify the means for achieving them' (strange sentence, seems as if something is missing) (Guild and Garger 1998). Jeremy Harmer addresses this issue as well when he says the following:

'The moment we realise that a class is composed of individuals (rather than being some kind of unified whole) we have to start thinking about how to respond to those students individually so that while we may frequently teach the group as a whole, we will also, in different ways, pay attention to the different identities we are faced with.'

This is not to say that we constantly need to change

our instructions to make sure that we reach each and every learner all of the time. But a mix of methods can provide learners with new possibilities and resources to explore outside the classroom, including those which are new and different for them. In addition, encouraging learners to try out new methods for themselves can (encourage) stimulate them to become more independent and autonomous learners, another way of helping them to discover their styles.

As Andrew Cohen says:

'Indeed we learn in different ways and what suits one learner may be inadequate for another. While learning styles seem to be relatively stable, teachers can modify the learning tasks they use in their classes in a way that may bring the best out of particular learners with particular learning style preferences. It is also possible that learners over time can be encouraged to engage in 'style-stretching' so as to incorporate approaches to learning they were resisting in the past.'

Myths and misconceptions

As there are a number of misconceptions about learning styles, this is an important area to cover in any discussion of the topic. For one thing, learning styles are not an excuse. Finding out about one's strengths and weaknesses does not mean that one is allowed to simply give up because he or she is not particularly good at something. The goal instead is to create a mindset in which the person

is made cognizant of his or her particular situation, to expand on it and grow. In any discussion with learners about their styles, the option of falling back on a weakness as a reason not to do something is simply not on the table. It would also be a misconception to assume that learners cannot stretch out of their styles. Although the style can be seen as a foundation, most learners have incorporated methods ascribed to other styles to learn and acquire knowledge. Being aware of the wide range of possibilities in learning does not mean that a learner will not make use of them if necessary to achieve a particular goal or when learning a particular subject. And if the learner can do this successfully, motivation may result in a positive self-fulfilling prophesy.

Another misconception is that teachers tend to label or pigeon-hole learners once they know their styles. This is most certainly not the aim of those of us working in this field. It is interesting to observe students and to be aware of their styles as it makes giving advice to/ answering particular questions easier, but it does not mean that a teacher should assume a learner cannot grow or change. Teachers can reassure learners that ANY strength or strategy which will help them achieve a goal is fine, there is no need to only use the ones most commonly (employed) used in this learning style. However, they also need to have the self-confidence to use strategies comfortable for them,

even if they have been told in the past that these strategies will not help them to learn.

In addition, styles are not 'right' or 'wrong'. They are valueless. No style is 'better' than another style; one may be more suited to learning a particular skill than another, but each of the styles has its strong and weak points. Style and competence should not be confused. In a language class it is certainly possible that two people with very similar learning style profiles are at completely different levels of language. So many other factors must be considered that simply basing all conclusions about learners on style would be a mistake. It could also be possible that a learner is enrolled in a programme which is not the right one for him or her. Discoveries about style could lead to making a change, but it may also simply lead to finding new ways to learn.

Implementation

There are a variety of ways in which learning styles can be implemented into the foreign language classroom. In *Spotlight on Learning Styles*, teachers are provided with checklists which they can go through and discuss with their students. Particular characteristics of styles are given, as well as tips and strategies. The styles of both the teacher and the students are looked at, and suggestions are made as to how to expand a teacher's repertoire in the classroom. As many of us teach in the way we prefer to learn, we may overlook the needs of learners whose styles are very different from our own. *Spotlight on*

Learning Styles has been written to remind teachers about the types of students in our classrooms and to provide tips, hints and ideas to ensure that teachers can reach as many of their students as possible and find both satisfaction and joy in doing so.

Style types

As there are a large number of learning styles and surveys to determine them used by researchers and practitioners, it was necessary to decide which ones to focus on in *Spotlight on Learning Styles*. For this reason three particular areas were chosen. This logical sequence of gathering information (which logical sequence?) led to the choice of three distinct areas to cover, beginning with visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modalities (sensory channels of perception), global / analytic thought processes (cognitive processing) and Mind Organisation (behaviour based on perception and organization of information). By adding on to the knowledge provided by one style, a more composite picture of a



learner can be made. After doing all three surveys, the individuality of each of the learners becomes more apparent, the uniqueness of each learner can be appreciated, and suggestions for strategies can be tailored to the particular learner and situation.

According to Cohen:

'Although numerous distinctions are emerging from the literature, three categories of style preferences are considered particularly relevant and useful to understanding the process of language learning: sensory/perceptual, cognitive and personality-related preferences' (Reid 1995 and Weaver 1996).

The standard model of VAK generally includes visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners. These were researched early on by Walter Barbe and Raymond Swassing (1979) who defined what they called modalities as 'any of the sensory channels through which an individual receives and retains information.' However, after working in

adult education and teacher training for some thirty years, it seems that adults tend to be either kinaesthetic motoric (tactile) learners or kinaesthetic emotional ones. The exact age as to when this split takes place has not been determined, but it seems to show up in the later years of high school and is certainly apparent by the time learners reach tertiary level education or take on a job. For this reason, *Spotlight on Styles* looks at these two areas separately and provides ideas for working with both types.

Visual learners generally remember best when they can see something or write it down. Examples of activities for them include noticing things about them, using colours, drawing or creating pictures in their minds, recognizing shapes, and describing items or people in writing.

Auditory learners remember what they hear or say. Therefore the activities for them include passing on sentences to each other orally, telling stories or putting them in the correct order through listening, describing people aloud, asking questions, and matching beginnings and endings of jokes they hear.

Kinaesthetic emotional learners need to feel comfortable with others and want to have the feeling of belonging. Therefore, they are given the chance to work together in groups to plan joint events, tell each other's horoscopes or fortunes, find positive adjectives to describe

classmates, or tell others how they feel about a particular topic within a safe setting.

The kinaesthetic motoric learners need to move about and learn best when they can try things out for themselves. They are given the opportunity to walk around and mingle to gather information, create the moving parts of a machine in a group, pass on a word by writing on someone's back, or act words for others to guess.

The last section has mixed activities which are designed to appeal to all learner types such as describing, drawing or 'becoming' pictures, playing memory in groups, remembering and repeating unusual definitions, as well as kinaesthetic bingo and gap texts. Students are also encouraged to contribute to the activities and if some are more successful than others, they can be asked to help fellow students or give personalised tips on how to remember things better.

Global / Analytic Learners

Moving on to cognitive processing, we take a look at the global / analytic learning style. One of the first researchers to look into these styles was Herman Witkin (1981) who worked with fighter pilots to discover what influenced their decisions while piloting planes. He came up with his theory of field-dependent (global) learners and field-independent (analytic) learners based on this research and went on to develop the 'Group Embedded Figures Test', still used today to determine cognitive learning styles.

Global learners tend to process information holistically and by remembering the entire experience rather than just details. They are also relationship-oriented and may be more emotional than analytic learners. The activities designed to appeal to them include a group drawing exercise to create a person, writing stories about others in the class, coming up with an idea for a class excursion and playing games like 'You-Robot'.

Analytic learners, on the other hand, like details and structure. They may prefer to work alone as they prefer not to be distracted. They are generally self-motivated and may be quite goal-oriented. The activities created for them include finding mistakes, solving logical puzzles, figuring out a detective story, and creating rules for specific activities.

Mind Organisation

The last of the styles looks at behaviour and is created by putting together the idea of perception as concrete (using the senses) or abstract (using ideas and feelings) and the element of organisation (either systematically or non-systematically). This gives us four distinct styles which were created by April Bowie (1997), who began her research working with adolescents. She devised a learning style survey called 'Mind Organisation' and used it as a basis for counselling high school students and helping them to learn. Her four styles include:

- Flexible Friends who perceive abstractly through ideas or

feelings and organise non-systematically.

- Expert Investigators who perceive abstractly through ideas or feelings and organise systematically.
- Power planners who perceive concretely using their senses and organise systematically
- Radical Reformers who perceive concretely through their senses but organise non-systematically

Flexible Friends like to work in groups, especially those in which they like the other people. They are creative and intuitive and value personalised learning experiences. They are also enthusiastic and express their empathy for others. Language activities which appeal to them include setting personal goals, writing down sentences which are true for them in a dictation exercise, learning to use vocabulary of emotions and feelings, completing sentences about their partner, and finding things in common with others.

Expert Investigators are logical and systematic learners. They tend to be perfectionists so they prefer to work at their own speed. In dealing with others they are generally logical and rational. They especially like to do research and to know where they can get information from. The language activities designed for them include working with facts and informative materials, finding errors and doing research for a class excursion followed by a report on how it went.

Power Planners like to be organised and are generally detail- and task-oriented. In groups they may take on a natural role as a leader and enjoy hands-on activities. The language tasks designed for them include putting processes in order and explaining them to others, finding explanations and rules for difficult grammar points, using linking words correctly to create plans and setting priorities.

Radical Reformers are risk-takers and are often curious about a number of different fields of study. They generally rely on their institution to solve problems but pride themselves on finding unique ones. They tend to 'think outside the box' and value creativity and ingenuity. In groups, they may inspire others and value real-life experiences. The activities for them include realistic role plays, creating and acting out a scenario based on a true story, buying and selling everyday items to each other by finding unusual uses for them, creating statements about themselves which the others guess are true or false.

Moving on

The information presented in this article is the start; the end of the journey is up to the readers and users of the book. As learning styles and the discoveries which occur when people become aware of them is a never-ending story, the goal of this article and the book itself is to open up a perspective on learning which perhaps had not been considered before. Moving on to personal research or professional development, stretching outside your own comfort zone, or helping students to realise their true potential

are only some of the places these ideas can take you. The excitement of discovery remains to those who use the information to delve into themselves and their teaching as well as their students and their learning in whichever way they choose. The impetus is here, the joy of further discovery is up to you.

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Editor's Note: Marjorie's article was first published on the Delta website.

About Marjorie



Marjorie Rosenberg teaches English at the language institute of the University of Graz, trains teachers and works with corporate clients. She has published books with CUP and Pearson. Her book Spotlight on Learning Styles was published by Delta Publishing in 2013. Marjorie is the coordinator of IATEFL BESIG.

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Interacting with interaction patterns

Maria Sachpazian

As teachers we all know that interaction patterns (IPs) are a necessary element of a balanced learner-centered lesson. This article aims to examine the usefulness and the issues behind IPs and provide ideas for teachers whose classrooms are not particularly teacher/student-friendly to use varied IPs without wasting a lot of time.

The value of interaction patterns

When first introduced IPs were seen as a nuisance, and in Greece where I have been teaching for the last 22 years, many school owners thought that there was no reason for the noise varied IPs generated or for the general hassle that at first couldn't convince the parents, that actual teaching was taking place. In the 90s it was felt that we cannot teach any L2 without varied IP and exam boards followed suit by examining candidates orally in pairs.

Undoubtedly, there is great value in IP and the more we dig the more benefits we can unearth. A lesson with varied IP is a lesson paced to the needs of the learners. Learning is shared, and therefore it becomes fun and sometimes relatively effortless as learners share the responsibility of the task. A definite plus is that by working in teams or pairs, learners have the chance to become deeply involved in their

own learning. Therefore, we have better distribution of Student Talking Time (STT) per student. This means that everybody works and learners interact with their peers who are at roughly the same level of linguistic competence. Finally, apart from being good exam training, varied IP empower learners by giving them choice.

Any problems?

There is no perfect teaching tool, so surely there are drawbacks. First of all, varied IPs call for very well organized teachers. If the task of setting up and monitoring pairs or group work tasks at first glance belies its difficulty and complication, a trial lesson will convince teachers that IPs demand clear instructions and a well-structured introductory stage so that the learners will not resort to their L1.

There are also practical problems. In some small-sized classrooms it is too difficult to move desks around and if one does so, there will be noise. The mentality of the students is another issue to take into consideration. Last year, I had the good fortune to teach Russian students at a Summer School in Oxfordshire. Although they were highly motivated, working in groups or pairs was not their idea of learning. Initially, they seemed hesitant to do anything without the teacher, which means that all

action stopped when the teacher went away, or they used pair work time to speak Russian. We should take into consideration that the mainstream educational system is the one that shapes the students learning behavior and this is quite difficult to change.

The last problem with IP is our own attitude to it. Talking to a colleague experienced in observing teachers, I realised that he had even worked out a number of changes within a 90-minute lesson. He told me that there should be no less than 6 changes of partners, so that learners can really venture out of their comfort zone. Admittedly, I was impressed and I quite agree with the fact that learners should get used to working with different partners, but frankly I cannot plan my lessons dividing my time by the number of partner changes needed. Every such change is followed by students moving their belonging and time lost on shuffling desks and chairs.

Is there a time when using IPs is not such a good idea?

To answer that, I would say that a rule of the thumb would be how much time is spent on setting up the task in relation to the work the learners produce.

There are more situations when varied IPs might not work, such as the following:

When the learners are too weak to work on their own while



the material is challenging class dynamics and relationships between learners do not permit it.

the learners are not actually used to learning/working in groups

When the furniture and the space in the classroom are not helpful

All these barriers are not meant to discourage the teachers from using varied IP. The point is that teachers should first address these issues and then use IP as part of their teaching routine.

Firstly, teachers ought to take ownership of their classroom and the best way to do this is by moving the furniture around in a way that suits their teaching needs and caters best for their learners' learning needs. This might not be easy at first, especially if one shares classrooms

with other teachers, but it can be accomplished. Secondly, teachers should actually "teach" learners how to work in pairs/groups starting from how important it is to producing language to teaching them useful expressions for taking part in any discussion, which is useful for most exam anyway. Open pairs might come in handy in this situation.

In order to encourage learners to venture out of their comfort zone teachers can create name cards for all the learners and asks them to add their personal touch. Then teachers put the name cards at the place where each learner is supposed to sit before the lesson starts. This means that the teacher has already worked out who has recently worked with whom, which further highlights that using varied

IPs requires advance planning. To face the practical problems of unmovable desks and chairs, teachers can join two desks to create a group of four. If learners cannot sit facing each other they can work:

a) in one pair with the person sitting next to them:

b) in another pair the person sitting behind/in front of them as they can physically turn their bodies for a while.

c) and then another pair which will be created if the students sitting on one of the desks exchange seats.

In addition to these three pairs we also have a group of four. In total we have 4 changes of partners without much

moving around. If we take into consideration that learners are rotated in each lesson this shows that students do not get the chance to find their comfort zone and “nestle” there.

Conclusion

For all their benefits, IPs do not mean less but more work for the teacher. If we want to meet specific learning goals, everything needs to be planned beforehand. In addition to these we must also bear in mind that unmonitored pair or group work, is work lost. Work done in groups or pairs can save time if reporting time is cut or if new pairs/ groups are created so that reporting back is not a boring and tedious phase during which nobody listens, unless they are the ones doing the talking.

Difficult, interesting and colourful, varied IPs have a lot to add to any lesson and they truly bring out the learners making them the actual focal point of the lesson so it is worth finding a place for them in every lesson.

About Maria



Maria Sachpazian BA education / RSA dip/tefl (hons) lives and works in Thessaloniki, Greece. She is the Managing Director of Input on Education a company which provides academic, business support and consultancy to Foreign Language Schools. She is also an educational management specialist who has worked as a teacher trainer and materials’ developer. Maria works as an EFL teacher at the Straight Up Markoyannopoulou schools.

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Mea Culpa – My Teaching Mistakes

Dimitris Primalis

Dimitris Primalis is revisiting his most common mistakes in his 20-year teaching career and is sharing tips and hints on how to prevent or cope with them.

Class (mis)management



The Big Day

It was my very first observation using the Interactive Whiteboard and data projector. The school had acquired them a few months earlier, and I had spent quite a lot of my recess time acquainting myself with them. My PowerPoint™ presentation was ready with some bits of good humour and everything had been meticulously planned and practised over the weekend. My class - about 20 sixth graders – were (my class was a bit noisy) a bit noisy. They had known me since the previous year and were happy working in pairs or in groups.

In my nightmares before the observation, to my horror, I saw my laptop getting stuck, the projector overheating, or the PowerPoint™ not appearing on the IWB.

The big day had finally come and despite my sweaty palms and forehead, the equipment worked flawlessly. All the PowerPoint™ slides appeared on the IWB. Yet, something seemed to be wrong. I could feel my students getting (more) restless and noisier than ever, and they were constantly interrupting me by asking impertinent questions...



A week later, the feedback I received was not flattering at all, but shed some light into my students' mysterious behaviour. I had simply glued myself in front of the laptop trying to ensure it worked well, thus disregarding my students: no eye contact, no mingling in class and monitoring pairs or groups as I usually did. No wonder....

Whether you are an experienced or inexperienced teacher, classroom management will always be a challenge when dealing with new classes or students you had the year before. Even though it is a temptation to assume that students do not like your personality, most of the times problems with management can be attributed to other factors such as:

1. Lack of variety of interaction in class
2. Overdrilling and meaningless repetition
3. "Impersonalized learning"
4. Lack of motivation

5. Endless lecturing
6. Sticking to the lesson plan instead of listening to our class
7. Body language and no eye contact
8. Agreeing on and building a code of ethics in class
9. Lack of individual and class goals
10. Teacher burnout

There can be many more reasons you can discover when reflecting on your class.

How do I go about it?

You are not the only one who has faced such problems. Talk with colleagues you trust or the school psychologist. Try some course of action given below and if it doesn't work, ask the director of studies to help you. Pretending it is not happening can only augment the problem.

How do I trace the root of the problem?

In class there are many things happening at the same time,

and it is practically impossible to monitor everything. Technology can help us by recording part of or the whole lesson. Peer observations can help a great deal, on condition that they are not obtrusive and that the observer gives constructive feedback.

What can I do once I spot the root of the problem? Some practical tips and hints

Involve students during the lesson. Having spent most of the day sitting at a desk and being passive is not the best thing that can happen to adults, let alone kids. Seize every opportunity to ask them to work in pairs or groups, so that they can express their opinion and physically move in class.

2. Reduce overdrilling and introduce meaningful real-life or simulated authentic tasks. Use those tasks in order to stimulate their interest and open a window on the real world in what is very often an artificial and sterilized learning space. Technology can be a valuable ally with videos, music or Skype™ connections.

3. Most coursebooks are written for an average, global class. But in real life, one size does not always fit everyone. Make their learning more personal by adapting tasks to cater for the learners' interests and background. Everybody can talk about their experiences, no matter how young they are.

4. Learners often end up in your class because the curriculum or their mom and dad say so. Most of

the time they cannot associate English with travelling, meeting other people, expressing ideas, joining international interest groups and communities. Raising awareness of the potential opportunities can engage them more in their learning, as well as dispel the notion that language learning is all about tedious grammar tasks.

5. Teachers are often described as would-be performers (singers, actors and so on) and people who love the sound of their own voice. However, lecturing has been steadily losing ground and we no longer wish to be seen as authorities. Personally, I tend to speak a lot when I am tired or feel insecure. A couple of carefully-planned concept checks or lead-in questions can reduce our teacher talking time, which usually bores our students to tears. This will also give them the opportunity to be actively involved expressing their views instead of chatting with the student sitting next to them.

6. Having spent hours on the lesson plan, I often found myself rigidly following it to the last detail, focusing on my notes, rather than monitoring my students and listening to them. However, the teacher should act as a general in the battlefield, modifying original plans to deal with unexpected difficulties, being flexible in order to cater for the learners' needs. Students will appreciate a teacher who mingles in class,

puts aside the scheduled lesson and focuses on their weaknesses or even gives them a reassuring look instead of an aloof teacher, who is engrossed in their papers.

7. Students often come from different family or learning backgrounds. Agreeing on a set of rules gives them a clear idea of what is acceptable or not. Some of them may be tempted to bend the rules, or even test to what extent you intend to stick to them. Your being firm and fair is always appreciated by learners at the end of the year.

8. Doing the next couple of pages from your grammar book is an aim that can hardly inspire language teachers, let alone students. Personalizing learning and helping students set realistic goals, either as individuals or as groups (e.g. I can ask for information when I am on holidays), can motivate them and urge them to participate actively in class.

9. All work and no play makes the teacher a dull educator... As a novice teacher, I thought that the workload would decrease as experience accumulated along with my lesson plan and materials bank. After 20 years of teaching, not only has it not decreased but it tends to take more of my time as new challenges arise. Make sure you find your own personal way to recharge your batteries and escape from the teaching context in your personal life.

One could fill volumes with tips and hints about classroom management, but if I had to choose one more that would be "positive labeling" and praising the students. I am not implying that you should lie. We are all good at something - no need to be an EFL skill - that we can be praised in

public for. For example, it can be technology. It may work wonders with learners who are used to being told off constantly for their poor performance.

In a nutshell...

Class problems will always arise but if I could conclude with a motto that would be: observe, identify the problem, act swiftly!

About Dimitris



Dimitris has been teaching English as a Foreign Language for more than 20 years to a wide range of levels and age groups. He has written five test books for Macmillan and is the winner with Chryssanthe Sotiriou of the 2013 IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG scholarship. He is interested in integrating technology into the syllabus and likes to share his experiences in education writing articles and blog posts and giving workshops at conferences such as the IATEFL, TESOL France, TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece and ISTEK. He works at Doukas primary school in Athens, Greece.

Homework: the dos and dont's

Malou Van Loon

Homework is an aspect of education that pupils often dislike, detest or even hate. Most of the time, this attitude is a result of a lack of knowledge both teachers and pupils have regarding the use of homework. In this article I will describe how homework can have positive effects on the learners and how teachers can ensure that students have a positive attitude towards homework.

An expert in this field is Harris Cooper, Professor of Education and Chair and Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience. He conducted some invaluable research regarding homework which I will use in this article. He describes homework as: 'Tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours' (Cooper, 1989).

The most commonly made mistake is that teachers do not think enough about the tasks they assign to students. All too often pupils just have to finish the exercise they started in the classroom or do similar exercises repeatedly. This kind of homework does not really contribute to the pupils learning process. Giving homework is a chance to let the pupils deal with the subject matter in a different way than they already did during the lessons. There

are four different kinds of homework, which each fulfill another role in the learning process of the pupils.

Preparation homework: With this kind of homework, pupils can get acquainted with the subject matter they are going to see in the next few lessons. In this way, it will be easier for them to follow the lessons.

Practice homework: This type of homework focuses on practicing skills that the pupils have already acquired during the lessons. This doesn't mean that they have to do the same kind of exercises as they already did in the classroom. Tasks that pupils have to do at home offer a lot of opportunities. At home, the pupils have other means than they have in the classroom. For example, they can go online to look for extra information or do exercises, they can go outside to see the world and use it in an exercise and so on.

Extension homework: This kind of homework can be used to let the pupils discover something more about the subject matter. When assigning extension homework, it is important that you focus on the interests of the pupils. In this way, pupils are more involved in the task and therefore more motivated.

Creative homework: This is the kind of homework that can really motivate your pupils. When doing creative homework, pupils deal with the subject matter in a totally different way than they do in the classroom. With this kind of homework, pupils can show their own creativity, which leads to a better involvement and a better understanding. Developing creative homework can, but does not have to take more time than other kinds of homework, but it is worth it. When you design a good creative task, pupils will be much more motivated and their attitude towards it will change drastically.

Which kind of homework you have to choose and when, depends on the subject matter and on the goals you are aiming at. We should try to vary in types of homework as much as possible. We do have to keep in mind that not every type of homework is suitable for every piece of subject matter. We have to think about which kind of homework would be best in which situation. This motivation can also be a stimulator for the pupils. When they know why they have to do a certain task, their perspective will change for the better. The why of homework should be given more thought. Which goals are



we aiming at? Which effect are we focused on?

Harris Cooper describes 3 types of effects of homework: immediate achievement and learning, long-term academic effects and nonacademic effects (Cooper, 1989). Immediate achievement and learning are the effects you can immediately see and test in the classroom. The pupils have a better understanding of the subject matter, are more fluent in a certain skill, etc. Long-term academic effects can't be tested or seen right away. Those effects include better study habits and skills, a better attitude towards school, etc. The last type of effects is the nonacademic effects. These form the pupils as a person. They learn self-discipline, self-direction, and organization, among others.

It is very important not to just focus on the immediate achievement and learning, but also on long-term and non-academic effects. Through homework, pupils can learn a lot more than they can in the classroom. It's important for

us teachers, to realize and use that.

Besides that, homework may never be given as a punishment. Our task is to create a positive attitude towards homework with the pupils. When homework is given as a punishment, this attitude will only be negatively influenced.

When the pupils have done their homework, it is up to the teacher to correct the tasks and to give feedback. Giving feedback is a crucial part of homework. It is often forgotten or there isn't enough time to do it properly, but we should acknowledge that this part of homework is as important as all the other parts. The pupils have to know what they did wrong, why it was wrong and how they can improve. If we give enough feedback, pupils will be able to adjust their methods of doing homework and perform better the next time.

Giving homework is a part of teaching that is often underrated. We should put more time and effort in

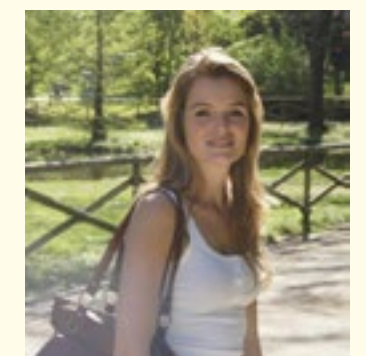
it in order to change the attitude pupils have towards homework. If we do so, pupils could learn a lot from doing homework and we would benefit from it during the lessons.

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About Malou



Malou is from Belgium and has recently graduated as an English teacher from Thomas More University College. Along with a fellow student, she wrote a thesis on homework.



Moderating Class Blogs

Sophia Mavridi

Class blogging can be a great learning experience for both you and your students. However, merely creating a class blog does not necessarily lead to productive discussions or learning. Additionally, we should not assume that students, regardless of their age, are aware of concepts such as responsible online conduct and Digital Citizenship. What if their posts are not always appropriate? What about spam and flaming?

Consequently, the teacher's role in moderating and facilitating purposeful discussions and contributions is vital. As a moderator you will have to take informed decisions about:

- when a post or comment should be approved.
- how to organise online discussions and motivate students to participate in them.

- how to help students feel part of a learning community.
- how to keep the discussion thread free of personal insults and derogatory comments.
- how to develop their digital literacy skills so that moderation can gradually become less frequent.

The degree and criteria against which to evaluate what should or shouldn't be moderated might depend on various factors such as your students' age or whether they have been introduced to eSafety and Digital Citizenship. In the early stages, while students should be given freedom over the ideas they express, they should also be aware that you are the administrator of the blog and thus posts and comments should be first approved by you. This is to ensure that only appropriate content is posted on your blog and that

a high degree of etiquette is maintained.

Tips and guidelines

- Make sure your students are aware of the rules and guidelines of the blog so that they know what is or isn't appropriate. If possible, involve them in the decision making. It will encourage greater ownership and motivation to respect the rules.
- Consistency is important. Decide in advance whether posts or comments that contain accuracy mistakes will be accepted or not. I personally think that rejecting such content can be extremely discouraging for students but it clearly depends on the primary aims of your blog. I publish comments even if they contain mistakes to reinforce students' communication skills and sense of community. As far as posts are concerned, I adopt a process writing approach where students submit their first draft and then revise their work according to my feedback. You need to make your own decisions as a class and stick to them.
- Decide in advance whether or not you are going to moderate YLs & teens' personal pictures. While there is not a consensus decision on this, you should know that according to Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), you need the parents' consent to post a picture of an under 13 year-old-child. My piece of

advice? Students of all ages love posting their pictures on class blogs and might feel disappointed to see them turned down. I generally advise students to attach creative commons licensed pictures but when someone attaches a picture of themselves, I use skitch to blur the face even when the parents don't mind their child's picture posted online.

- Be aware of the links students might share on posts or comments. I think that not allowing students to share links would not reflect reality, since we all do on a regular basis. Instead, teach them that not all links are innocent and that they should check before they share with their classmates. And, in any case, moderate before you post.

Quite recently, a student of mine left the following comment on our blog:

ThunderSlashGR says:

May 14, 2013 at 9:53 pm (Edit)

Thank You Guys. If you want to download and play this game, you can do it from this site <http://eune.leagueoflegends.com/>



Although the student is a responsible internet user, I thought it was essential that I first ensure the link was a safe one and that it did not direct students to illegal game downloads.

- Teaching commenting skills is necessary if we are to transform our blog from a static space to an interactive community. According to Morris (2011) quality comments are:

- Relevant to the post.

- Complementing the writer, asking a question or adding further information to the post.
- Proofread by the students for correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.

As a moderator, you might also need to provide timely intervention when a discussion goes off topic, or when an argument should be resolved. Sometimes students might transfer an argument that started in class to the blog especially when they feel active parts of this online community. Your role as a moderator and facilitator can be vital in such cases.

A final piece of advice

Moderation can be time-consuming but it is part of our job to ensure our online community runs smoothly and learning takes place. You can always promote students who are willing and involved to moderators or assistant moderators as I usually call them. It will take the burden off you and they will be given a great learning opportunity. You will also encourage a sense of

ownership and belonging to the group.

This article is part of Sophia's blog post "All things in eModeration: Moderating Class Blogs and Facebook Students Groups" first published on her blog ELT@first site in May 2013.

About Sophia



Sophia Mavridi is an EFL teacher and a Teacher Trainer. She has worked at primary and secondary school level in Athens, Greece but also as a senior teacher in Cambridge, UK. She is currently completing her Master's degree in Educational Technology & TESOL with the University of Manchester and researching the pedagogical application of Digital Citizenship, Literacies and Ethics in regard to technology integration in educational contexts. She is the IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG Treasurer and a regular presenter at international conferences.

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How E-Tutors Can Sustain Learner Motivation and Participation

Vedrana Vojkovic-Estatiev

Online learners are often concerned about whether they will be able to remain sufficiently motivated to participate actively and complete the course in which they are enrolled. This applies both to courses which are not for credit (such as MOOCs), and for credit ones, although it may occur more frequently in the former case.

As a tutor in a required ELT writing skills course designed for undergraduate communication science students, I initially meet with my students in a face-to-face environment, where I demonstrate how the course functions. The rest of the twelve-week course takes place in the LMS (Learning Management System) Moodle and the e-portfolio Mahara, while the final examinations are proctored. The activities within each unit are self-paced, but deadlines have been set for particular units. Even so, participation may become inconsistent over such an extended period of time, and the tutor can play an essential role in ensuring motivation does not lag.

According to Williams (as cited in Packham, Jones, Thomas, & Miller, 2006, p.241) "the role of the tutor is crucial to the success of any form of computer-mediated communication".

A study by Hara and Kling (1999) identified three interrelated sources of potential frustration for online learners, which may inhibit active participation and thus educational opportunities. These are lack of prompt feedback, ambiguous instructions and technical problems. The research of Packham et al (2006) revealed that, from a student perspective, effective e-moderation overwhelmingly depends on the quality and timeliness of the feedback students receive. The second most important factor is moderator support and encouragement, whilst the third refers to module management; i.e. facilitation and guidance through the learning process. This is further supported by McPherson, Nunes and Zafeiriou (2003), who describe the importance of the e-tutor's social role, in which the tutor is responsible for fashioning an environment which students will view as friendly and conducive to learning.

This all suggests that the efforts of the online tutor are often crucial to helping students sustain their motivation and stay on the course. The same may be said of teachers in a classroom environment, but it is worth pointing out that the

issues which may thwart the participation of online students are arguably more easily resolved in a face-to-face setting.

So, what can a tutor do to encourage student motivation and participation? I have found the following steps to be particularly effective, not necessarily in the following order.

- Post detailed updates on the course notice board two or three times per week. These may include reminders about deadlines, but also information on how the group is progressing. Students will be intrigued to see how the group as a whole is doing; if, for instance, a particular activity proved easy/challenging for most of them, or the time of day the majority is logging on. The tutor should not address the progress of individual students on the course notice board.
- Provide each student with varied personalized feedback on particular tasks, including written feedback as well as podcasts and screencasts. Apart from catering to different learning styles, this maintains student interest. Ensure that the feedback is timely; try to provide it within a few days of the task submission.



- Engage with each student over their reflections on the completion of each unit. If students are required to reflect on their learning experiences in a blog or an e-portfolio, it can be very encouraging to receive comments on their posts. Moreover, a thoughtful response to their entries is likely to stimulate further learning.
- Set writing encouraging comments on each other's blog posts or journal entries as part of a task. Undergraduate students can be a little reluctant to comment on each others' posts, particularly in L2. However, this promotes group cohesion and increases awareness of the fact that they are writing for a wider audience.
- Occasionally, a student may not log on for several days or fail to keep up with the rest of the group. It is unhelpful to automatically ascribe this to poor time management or a failure to set priorities. Contact the student directly to ascertain what the problem is, and encourage and support them in catching up.

- Dedicate a space on the course home page to non-compulsory activities; for instance, links to games and quizzes relevant to your course. It is a good idea to vary these, and introduce new links when course records show that most students have accessed earlier ones.

On the whole, student response has been very positive. However, just as in the classroom, some students may not respond to any of the teacher's efforts to engage them, for various reasons. Another important consideration is that dedicated e-moderation is extremely time-consuming. Still, I believe this is satisfyingly counterbalanced by the learning that occurs.

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About Vedrana



DoS and part owner of a language school, she holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Zagreb and has been working with adult learners since 1997.

She currently lives in Belgium, where she is an online instructor to Croatian university students.

Can Creative Writing be Taught?

Malu Sciamarelli

Creative writing is personal writing, where the purpose is to express thoughts, feelings and emotions, rather than to simply convey information accurately, effectively and appropriately. It is expressed in an imaginative, unique and sometimes poetic way.

By analysing this definition, the main question which has been often debated can be more evident, and I have found myself asking this question many times: can creative writing be taught? And if so, how do we go about teaching it?

If creative writing is imaginative and unique, when teaching writing it is not feasible to start teaching from the basic stages, according to Anthony Seow (see Figure 1):

- **Planning**
- **Drafting**
- **Responding (Sharing)**
- **Evaluating**
- **Post-Writing**
- **Revising and Editing**

I believe that any attempt to reduce the teaching of creative writing to a system or set of formulas, with prescribed techniques and practices should be avoided. In order to do so, I start with creative destruction.

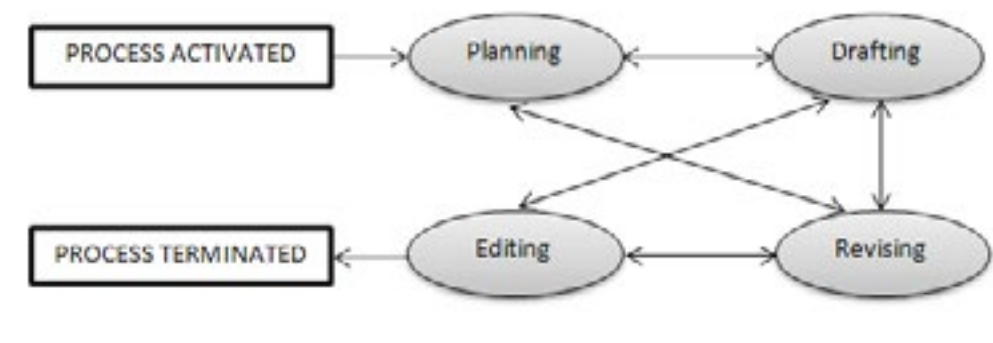


Figure 1: The writing process - Anthony Seow

Creative destruction is a term coined by the American economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter, to describe a process through which something new brings about the demise of whatever existed before it. Something new kills something older.

Borrowed and adapted to my classroom, creative destruction happens when I prepare an environment free of pre-concepts, where new ideas and steps can be followed every class. I destroy the pre-concept that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master, and use my reflective experience as a basis for creating new practices and motivating students to want to express themselves through writing. I also believe that the "experience of beauty must come first" (by Rubem Alves, a Brazilian educator):

"If I were to teach a child the beauty of music, I wouldn't

start with a musical score. We would listen together to the most pleasant melodies and I would tell them about the instruments which make the music. Then, amazed with the beauty of music, they themselves would ask me to teach them the mystery of those little black dots written on five lines. Because these little black dots are only tools for the musical production. The experience of beauty must come first."

Thus, I start my creative writing process approach by motivating students to experience writing in the most pleasant way, where they themselves would ask me to teach them the mystery of creative writing, just to find out that the key is in their own hearts.

To do so and help them develop their creativity, it is important to establish a Creative environment. This

is a free environment in the classroom, where students are motivated to do things differently and feel confident to risk contributing fully. It is an environment where ideas and thoughts are expressed freely, and where they learn that collaboration is better than isolation. It is said that if two men walk along a road, each carrying a loaf of bread and upon meeting they exchange the loaves, each man goes away with one. However, if two men walk along a road, each carrying an idea and upon meeting they exchange ideas, then each man leaves with two; so by learning to collaborate, and also to bring their own experience, the experience of what they have lived, the Generation of Ideas is a highly motivating process, in which ideas are not only generated but also shared, discussed and analyzed.

Finally, they express their creativity, thoughts and ideas by Writing, submitting their work to peer critique, in the same creative environment that was established in the first place, and then, if students deem necessary, they go on to Re-Writing (see Figure 2).

After I started developing these ideas about teaching creative writing, I could find the answer to my question. Yes, creative writing can be taught; however, to do so, the most important thing is to develop a creative and effective environment for learning, in

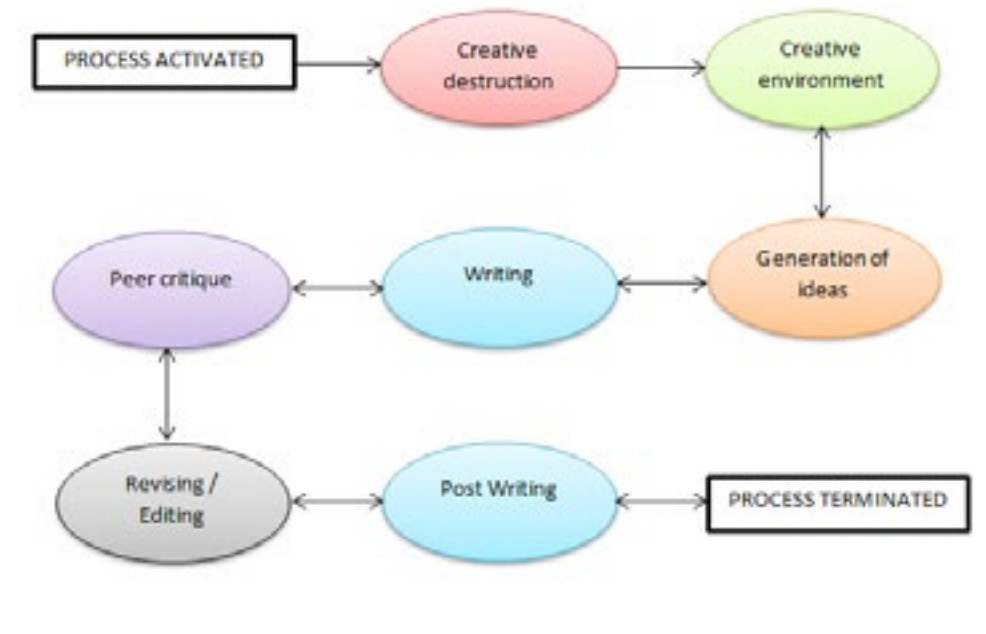


Figure 2: The Creative Writing Process Approach - Malu Sciamarelli

which the students will feel comfortable and motivated to explore their own writing, and so discovering their strengths and weaknesses. As for the teachers, an understanding of the characteristics of effective writing and the strategies used by successful creative writers is not enough. The creative writing teacher should be a constant investigator of the learners' creativity and writing processes in order to develop different and new steps to face the challenges that teaching creative writing involves.

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About Malu



Malu Sciamarelli has been working in Brazil for over 20 years as a teacher, materials designer, Cambridge English Language Assessment speaker and speaking examiner, and consultant for publishers. She has taught in schools, language institutes and in companies.

Radar Charts and Communicative Competence

Rob Szabó and Peter Rutherford

The notion of communicative competence was first popularised by Dell Hymes in the 1960s. The central idea was that the real-world use of a language involves far more than just structural accuracy. Hymes proposed four initial dimensions of communicative competence, which have since been amended by various linguists. Celce-Murcia (2007) produced a model including six dimensions.

Sociocultural competence - awareness of the cultural restrictions on language use

Strategic competence - the ability to compensate for breakdowns in communication and to enhance language learning

Linguistic competence - knowledge of grammar, the sound system, morphology and syntax

Formulaic competence - knowledge of collocation, idioms and lexical frames

Interactional competence - paralinguistic knowledge - pausing, silence, eye-contact, proxemics

The model was laid out in a geometric design with discourse competence as a central concept, with the

other competences radiating outwards.

The current situation with student language levels for use by human resource departments, pedagogical directors and trainers is that they generally only represent performance on structural tests and a brief interview. Depending on the language school, the student will be recorded as having a certain level on a linear scale (e.g. a numerical system, or the Common European Framework of Reference.)

One practical issue with representing students' language levels in this fashion can be demonstrated with the following example of two students, both judged to be at a B2 on the Common European Framework, but who differ enormously in terms of the balance of their skills.

Student 1

Performs particularly well on structural tests, having paid attention in German secondary school English lessons, and driven by a low tolerance for error and a high standard of rigour. However, this student struggles to communicate with English-speaking people. He battles to follow small talk and

socialising situations and has a poor record of achievement in intercultural situations at work. His boss has decided to keep him in a back-office position - a decision that may affect his future within the company.

Student 2

Performs at a mediocre level on structural tests, having learned English mostly on holiday and from computer games. His output is fluent, but full of errors and tends to be informal and eccentrically idiomatic. He is often asked by colleagues to handle telephone conversations with foreign people, but his boss is wary of giving him more official responsibility.

How should these students be evaluated? And how can we transfer this information simply and quickly to the HR department, the pedagogical supervisor and the trainer? The answer might lie in visual representations of data.



An advantage of using a radar chart to represent a student's communicative competence, instead of the traditional linear method, would be that it allows personnel managers, pedagogical directors and trainers to evaluate both a student's communicative ability and to compare students' communicative strengths and weaknesses quickly and easily. It would help shift the focus from structural accuracy to a more holistic view of communication and language training, which could affect fundamental aspects of a training programme (testing, class constitution, content delivery etc.) and would ideally result in more targeted and effective training.

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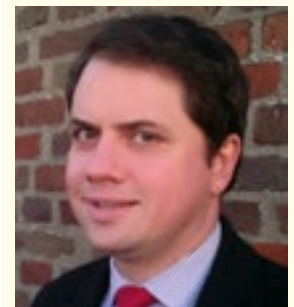
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About Rob and Pete



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Getting Learners On Board Instead of Bored

Rose Bard

Working with projects

Setting projects has never been easier with the tools available online nowadays. But the challenge lies in the mixed-level groups where there is always a struggle to balance tasks, how much English we can speak, and how to grade the language or the tasks without boring the higher level learners(HLLs) or frustrate the lower level ones (LLLs). After reading a wonderful blogpost from Sirja Bessero, a teacher based in Switzerland who had more experience with mixed-level groups, I came up with an idea that changed my view on the challenge of attending everyone's needs.

The objective of this article is to encourage you to explore projects and think of different ways you can group learners. In fact, giving them tasks that allow them to rely on their peers is just a great opportunity for HLLs. High-level learners can take different roles when interacting with lower levels or be challenged when working with other HLLs, and by giving the right task and the space to accomplish it they can really surprise us. Meanwhile you can provide the support they need to LLLs to advance in the language knowledge and skills.

The Mixed-Levels Challenge

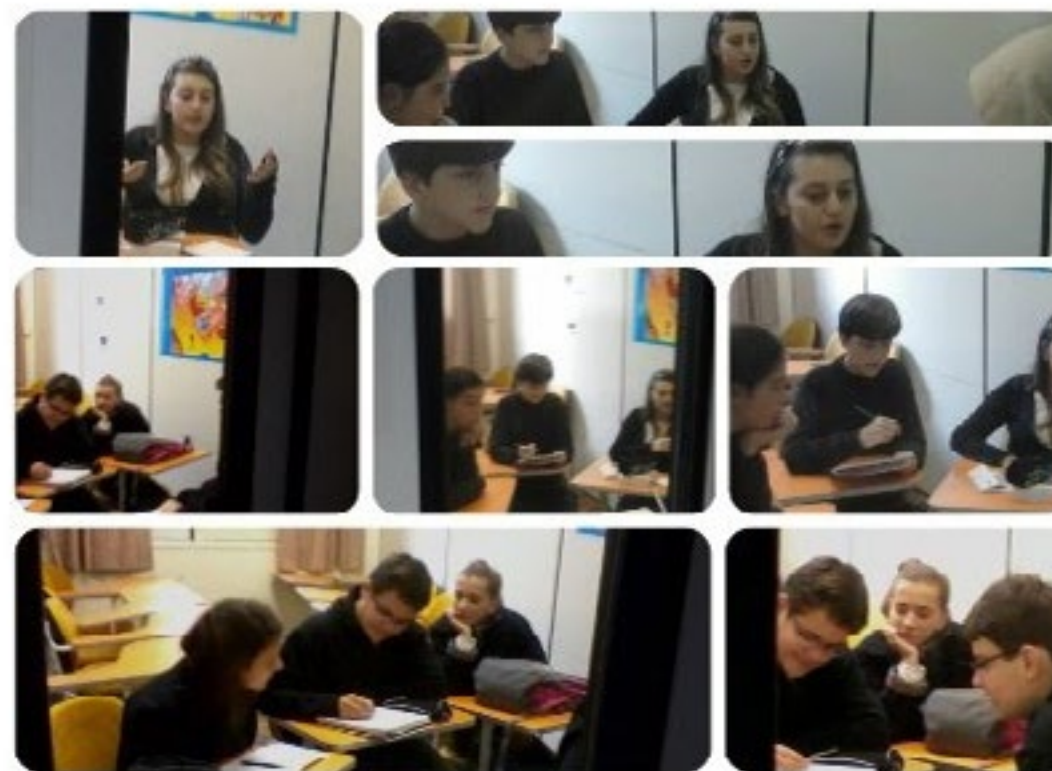
I work with small groups of 9th graders in the morning. It is a project where learners follow a course book and are placed according to their level of English whereas in the morning they are leveled according to their grade (I thought she has that group in the morning?). The project starts in the 6th grade until the 9th. My school is huge and we have our own language center. Every time a middle school student enrolls in the language center, it is compulsory that they attend the small groups in the morning. So in total they have 3,5 hours of formal instruction in English.

This project is called UP English and we don't use course books which has a flexible curriculum (What has a flexible curriculum? The book or the project?). But while in the afternoon they are more or less in the same level of English, in the morning they can be from zero to intermediate level. The higher the level of the students, the more accustomed they are to have English as the media for communication. As I have been working with 9th graders for 3 years, the challenge has always been the difference in levels.

The project: Celebrity Killed

The project was born from the need to provide LLLs with the opportunity to participate more actively in the process (which process?) while having a role (a role in what?) and the opportunity to learn and practise the language. So the group was split into two. HLLs received the task to write a script collaboratively to be dramatized by the whole group. They received the authorship role. In order to offer them the support they needed I created a webquest using Google Sites and added videos, instructions and questions to guide them.

At the beginning of the class, I would also dedicate about 10 minutes to briefly explain the assignment of the day and answer any questions. The webquest would be updated the day before the class and was divided into parts so it would not overwhelm them. They used a tablet to browse the webquest. If wi-fi is not available in your school, you can print out the pages and download the videos to a digital device. The videos are informative as well as a source of inspiration for them. We also used a cell phone to record their interactions during the task. The audio recording is a



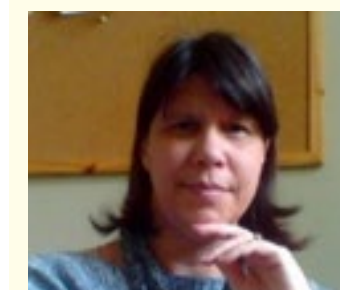
great tool to assess the quality of the group interaction as well as to hear what areas of the language they are good at and/or need improvement and who.

While HLLs were working on producing the script, LLLs were working towards learning how to read scripts and understand the present tenses that are commonly found in this genre. Once the script was ready, HLLs would become the directors and part of the cast, and LLLs the actors. The second phase of the project would be to read the script together as one group and work on improving the language. Then once the script had been proofread, it would be ready for rehearsal. Peer support is really important in the rehearsal stage. Then, it is up to them to decide if they want

to video it or present in any other form. I was suggested to go through storyboarding with them before the rehearsal so they could visualize the story. I didn't do it, but I intend to do so next year.

The acceptance (or appreciation) of the project among students was amazing. In all the groups, HLLs lived up to the expectation and used English on their own most of the time. They found the project to be really useful and practical. LLLs said that they appreciated the opportunity to clear up their doubts and work with more basic language and in L1 when needed.

About Rose



Rose is an English teacher fascinated by the learning process and its challenges. Her main focus is always helping students to develop language and life skills. She mainly works with small groups, all levels and ages. She loves working with Young Learners and adults, but teens are the ones who amaze her the most.

The Importance of Activating Schemata, Setting Contexts and Activating Lexical Sets in the Design of Listening Activities for Advanced Learners

Roseli Serra

Listening is often the skill that learners find the most problematic. This is certainly the case with my own learners, particularly the advanced level learners. They are often negatively surprised and dismayed by the difficulties they have in understanding spoken English outside the classroom. The reasons for such difficulties have been the grounds for a great deal of discussion in the ELT world. There does seem to be some consensus, at least amongst those authors I will refer to during the course of this article, that our approach to working with listening skills in the classroom needs to reflect the way our learners listen in L1 much more closely, and in particular on the listening strategies that are employed (used? Applied?) in L1 listening.

What is listening comprehension?

As Rixon points out (1993), in the 1950s, ideas regarding listening comprehension were dominated by the 'building blocks' view of comprehension, where listening comprehension was

considered to be simply a case of identifying phonemes and phonetic structures and putting them together to make words and sentences. Whilst there undoubtedly is an aspect of this 'building blocks' perspective in listening comprehension, there are many other processes which also need to be considered, these are detailed below.

Schematic and context knowledge

According to Sheerin (1987: 1) listeners have certain expectations regarding what they are about to hear. These expectations are drawn from their own experiences in terms of people, places, ideas and text types. For example, we expect a newsreader to use a certain type of language and to pass on a certain type of information in a certain way. In general, a listener who has no schematic knowledge of the listening text will either encounter more difficulties or will have to work harder to achieve comprehension than his/her counterparts who have some schematic knowledge.

Context knowledge is more specific than schematic

knowledge. In this case, the listener may have experience of being in a specific situation and be able to use this experience to his/her advantage. Penny Ur states (2004: 5) that there may be a series of environmental clues present in the situation such as smells, noises, background visuals such as diagrams etc. As Penny Ur suggests (2004: 3), as a result of our schematic knowledge and contextual knowledge, we rarely listen without some idea of what is going to be said.

The main benefit that schematic and contextual knowledge give to the listener is that the listener is better able to predict what she/he is going to hear. Penny Ur also points out (2004: 16) that if a listener is able to guess what is going to be said next, he will be more likely to perceive and understand it well. When we listen in L1 we frequently 'tune in' and 'tune out' based on our ability to predict what the next words will be. Clearly then, when the schemata has been activated and the context set, learners can make predictions about the structure of the script, the forms of interaction

and the type of language (amongst other aspects). All this information assists the learner in predicting what they will hear.

Learners often experience difficulties in comprehension when they have an inadequate knowledge of the schemata and/or context. In this case the teacher should make a judgement about what type of material to select based on how much contextual and schematic information will be required by the learners.

Lexical sets

Nowadays, as Goodith White points out (1998), the focus is on larger chunks of information rather than on individual words and sounds. This follows Michael Lewis' development of the Lexical Approach where the importance of grammar is downplayed in favour of vocabulary and lexical sets. This actually makes listening comprehension easier for learners as they learn language within fixed and semi fixed expressions or chunks. In this way, learners can predict the words which may follow a particular word. (3 sentences starting with 'This')

In order for learners to use their knowledge of lexical sets to assist in listening comprehension, these sets must be activated before the listening activity takes place. Without prior knowledge of this type of vocabulary, the learners will struggle to understand the report. They might get stuck on

a word they don't recognize and miss the rest of the report or give up because they feel overloaded by vocabulary they don't understand.

Conclusion

In conclusion, listening comprehension is complex and involves a variety of processes, many of which have been overlooked in traditional ELT theory. It is clear that effectively teaching listening comprehension can only be achieved through the analysis of the processes involved in L1 listening such as the activation of schemata, setting of context and activation of lexical sets, as a means of enabling learners to predict what they will hear.

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A Special Feat: Professional Development While Being a Parent

Eugenia Loras

For two and a half years I was not in the classroom. Not once did I think of deducting those years from my teaching career. And that, thanks to my two full-time students in Life Sciences and English Language Learning: my daughter, Maggie and my son, Nicholas.

The amount of professional development that I have been receiving through their physical, mental, psychological and linguistic development is invaluable.

This Special Feat is a message to all English Language Teachers who have become parents. Professional development does not stop when you become a parent. On the contrary and through personal experience, you can make the utmost out of your gift and responsibility of being a parent:

You can be one great teacher for your family and for your students. We have turned our home into a school and our school into our second home. I have been extensively studying the specialized topics of bilingualism and multilingualism and have been applying all that I am learning both to my children and my students.

Through this effort, several other colleagues-parents have become motivated and began studying and asking for advice on these issues - issues that are firmly connected to teaching languages.

Some of us may not be able to frequently visit workshops and conferences. That's alright! That is what webinars, online conferences and workshops, educational blogs, social media and books are for.

And some of us may be able to bring our own children into the groups we teach. This is my personal all-time favourite, as if I have been living and working for this.

Who else can better and so productively mix business with pleasure, than a teacher-parent?

What about the experience gained through having a full-time student? Being a parent and a language teacher almost all day and night, if necessary.

Congratulations to all teachers and parents for their feats. Thank you.

About Eugenia



Eugenia Loras, born and raised in Toronto, Canada, has been teaching English, training teachers and managing her own businesses for over nineteen years. With certificates in teaching English as a Foreign Language but also in specialized fields including learning disabilities, listening, speaking, writing and reading skills, school management, a wide variety of international examinations, professional development and many others, she now owns The Loras English Network in Zug, Switzerland along with her sister, Vicky Loras. She has been married for thirteen years and is the mother of two multilingual children ages 9 and 5.

OUR COLLABORATION WITH ELTA SERBIA

Applying Critical Thinking Strategies to Teaching EFL: Raising Awareness of Social Issues

A Lesson Plan on Bullying by Olivera Ćatić

Key words: critical thinking, critical strategies, bullying, discussion, project, raising awareness

Length of lesson: 45/90 minutes (objectives 1&2/&3)

Target learners: high school students – B1/B2 level

Number of students: may vary, applicable for smaller or large classes

General objective and description of the lesson: Working with video and students life experience we focus on developing students' capacity to recognize, interpret and fight against bullying through various group activities whose culmination would be a creative project.

The purpose of this lesson is to go beyond the EFL routine and dedicate some time to raising awareness of social issues such as bullying. Bullying Awareness month (October) is behind us, but our students and we as teachers need to be reminded throughout the year of the various kinds of bullying, physical and emotional, and different consequences it has on all our lives. Often the bullying goes unnoticed or unreported due to the stigma it carries in the social circles, especial at school. Teenagers are a particularly sensitive group and being open about it and discussing it with their peers is a good preventive measure. This lesson aims at relatively high-level students, fluent enough to form their own thoughts in English. The focus here is not on grammar or specific vocabulary but on expressing opinions in a balanced way and nurturing

a critical thinking mind (although certain language structures and words will appear and may be noted by the teacher, naturally, but perhaps they should be dealt with at another time).

At the beginning of this lesson, students are expected to have or to know:

- to recognize instances of bullying but perhaps not recognize all forms of verbal and emotional bullying
- to have witnessed or experienced some form of bullying or have bullied themselves (perhaps without knowing it) to be familiar with school policy on bullying and potential punishments
- to be able to express themselves clearly and accurately with non-impeding grammatical mistakes

- to be aware of consequences of bullying in terms of punishment, but perhaps not its effect on school life, neighbourhood, growing up etc

Lesson objectives

Objective #1

Given the term "bullying" and some video material students will identify, interpret and evaluate behavior of the people involved in bullying as measured by a questionnaire provided by the teacher.

Bloom's domain and level: Affective, Valuing level

Critical strategies employed:

S-32 Making plausible interpretations

S-17 Questioning deeply

Supporting Activity for Objective #1

After watching a video of a bullied child who strikes back, put in small buzz groups (3-5 students) students are asked to identify the incident (elicit the word 'bullying') and the roles of people involved. They will be given a handout with some open-ended questions targeting the roles of: the bully, the victim and the by-standers, and types of bullying – physical, verbal, emotional etc.

Questionnaire

1. Who are the people in the video and what are they doing? What 'social problem' can you identify?
2. Do any of these roles refer to any of the people in the video? Consider the two boys in the fight, the cameraman, other children around) Are there other ones?
 - Bully/ bullies
 - Victim(s)
 - Innocent bystander(s)
3. What forms of bullying are there? Give some examples.
4. Have you ever witnessed or experienced bullying? What kind? Have you ever been a bully, perhaps without realizing?

The link to the video: <http://tinyurl.com/4sgqmcx>

Later, they are launched into open class discussion in which they are asked higher-order questions: 'What did you see in the video? How did they behave and why? Is this behaviour acceptable and if not, why not? Who is the victim in the incident and why? What made this happen? etc' They are encouraged to ask their own questions to other groups.

They then divide the roles among the group members and form a Circle of viewpoints – they write what the bully's point of view is, the victim's, the bystander's and the school's. Each group member picks one role and notes down what the incident is like from that point of view. They ask themselves 'What is the motivation behind the (non) action? What was wrong about what happened? What should have happened? etc' They discuss within their groups the different perspectives. This should help them realize the multifaceted nature of the incident and understand all involved.

Objective #2

Given another video of students' reactions to the incident in question students in their groups compare and contrast their own ideas to the students' in the video

using complex sentences following the given models of thoughts (Unlike in the video... We believe...In contrast to...As seen here... Initially we thought...but after viewing this... I agree with...I disagree with... How can they know that... etc)

Bloom's Domain and Level: Cognitive, Analyzing

Critical strategies employed:

S-20 Analyzing or evaluating actions or policies

S-12 Developing One's perspective

Supporting Activity for Objective #2

Students watch a video material with students reacting to the incident in question and commenting on the interviewers questions like: Why do people bully, What would you do? What can be done? Who should do something about it? etc) They work in groups and discuss the similarities and differences of their views and the students' in the video. They note any changes in their opinion after watching other reactions and thoughts. They select one student from the group who will present their ideas to another group and gather any new questions or information and return to their original group,

summarizing the feedback they got.

The link to the video: <http://tinyurl.com/qxqcxdx7>

Students then go back to the original questionnaire they filled out individually and see if they want to change some of the answers. Has their view of bullying changed and how after the discussion?

Objective #3 (a new lesson, or for a double 90 min lesson)

Given a choice of various project ideas, students create their own carefully planned, designed and presented project they believe would help foster a bully-free environment in their school.

Domains: Cognitive, Creating

Strategies:

S-19 Generating and assessing solutions

S-27 Comparing and contrasting ideals with actual practice

Supporting Activity for Objective #3

The focus shifts on the situation in their own school and the students tell each other personal or known examples of bullying and the aftermath. They ask themselves, having their own school in mind:

How is bullying dealt with, if at all? Is it penalized and is the penalty sufficient or too harsh? What would they have done if they were the victim/ the by-standers/ the school? What would they say to the bully? Are only students bullies at schools? After the discussion (in groups or as a class discussion), they are given several choices of helping create a kindness zone in the school – what can they do to help? They can choose to make a poster, leaflets, banners, a rap song, and such. Each group chooses the preferred option and set up the plan – assign roles within the group, organize the workload step by step, set check-points and deadlines and forms of communication among the team members during the project time. After finishing the plan, they present it to the class. The project is assigned as homework.

Critical thinking beyond that specific class

Lessons such as this one make the teacher develop humility and realize that the topics dealt with in class, as in life, are complex, and that the teacher does not have all the answers. Bullying is not a problem that can be solved in a day, but we can strive to create a bully-free environment or at least raise awareness. That is a good lesson for the students as well. We, the teachers are not all-knowing, but we can open new doors for them.

The students can greatly benefit from this approach, since we bring them thought-provoking readings and videos such as this one that will bring some more controversial perspectives to the lesson and encourage all students to participate. They should stop worrying



about making mistakes and trying to find the one right answer – but see how every situation is open to interpretation, making sure the argumentation is sound, of course. The logic of reasoning should be given a lot of room, so they don't fall back to superficial conclusions. Hopefully, during the project and afterwards, students will also start looking at bullying as a broader issue, concerning all involved and start seeing themselves as actors within a caring community they help to create.

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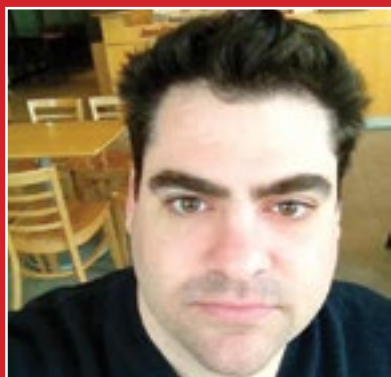
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