

Brought to you by the Belgian English Language Teachers Association

the belta bulletin

Issue 9 Autumn 2016



Including

Rusul Alrubail Andy Yarahmadi

Christina Chorianopoulou **James Taylor**

Dimitris Primalis Hana Tichá

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Contribute to the BELTA Bulletin!

If you would like to contribute to the journal, we would love to hear from you.

You can find the guidelines for submission on our website:

www.beltabelgium.com/the-belta-bulletin/

Our cover photo

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Editor Vicky Loras

Designer James Taylor

BELTA Board

President

John Arnold (president@beltabelgium.com)

Co-President / Finance and Membership

Mieke Kenis (finance@beltabelgium.com)

Vice-President / Sponsorship

Ellen de Preter (sponsorship@beltabelgium.com)

Editorial Officer

Vicky Loras (editorial@beltabelgium.com)

Advisory members

Joris de Roy, James Taylor and Jurgen Basstanie

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A Word From The President

Welcome to the autumn edition of the BELTA Bulletin!

Well, the summer is over and school has started. Lazy summer days have turned into hectic-filled days of learning – for both students and teachers. Here in Belgium, we are two months into our ten-month school year. We are gearing up for our first holiday week (yeah) and for grade reports (yuck) and exams (oh no!).

With all that going on, it's nice to know that we can count on the BELTA Bulletin to show up in our mail at just the right time to help us reconnect with teaching. This issue – like previous issues – is filled with great articles that allow us teachers to reflect on good practice and to apply it in our own classrooms. So, please enjoying reading the wonderful articles that Vicky Loras has curated and James Taylor has painstakingly laid-out.

Please take a minute to note down in your agenda BELTA Day 2017. We are honoured to announce the BELTA Day 2017 Plenary Speaker: the patron of IATEFL (the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language), MR DAVID CRYSTAL!

Many people are familiar with Mr Crystal's countless books on the English Language or his videos on the internet. He is a charismatic speaker who has informed and entertained audiences for years! If you have never had the opportunity to hear Mr Crystal speak live, then this is your only opportunity in Belgium this school year.

Mr Crystal will open the BELTA Day 2017 5th Anniversary Conference with his talk entitled Pragmatics: The Final Frontier and end the conference with Advanced Conversational English – Fact and Fiction. At another point during the day-long

event, Mr Crystal will take and answer language-focused questions. It is a unique opportunity to interact with a titan of the English as a Foreign Language Teacher community.

It promises to be a great day of networking and professional development – so you do not want to miss it. You can also submit a proposal to speak alongside Mr Crystal. Go to this link (tinyurl.com/beltadaycall) and complete the online form. You have until the end of the year (31 December 2016) to submit. Registration for the conference and the schedule for the day will be available via our website by 1 February 2017.

So enjoy reading this issue of the BELTA Bulletin and don't forget to note BELTA Day, 13 May 2017, in your agenda!

John Arnold
BELTA President

A Message From The Editor

Dear Readers,

It is unbelievable that it is time for the last issue of the year again! We hope you have had a wonderful time this year so far, and continue doing so in the remaining months to 2016. In this last issue, we have great articles to share with you once again – a huge thank you to all our writers! If you would like to write for us too, share one of your teaching stories, ideas you use in your classroom, and anything that has to do with education, please contact me at vickyloras@yahoo.ca – we will be delighted to have you aboard!

The cover article for this issue comes from Clare Fielder in Germany, who delves into an important topic for all of us who are educators – Continuous Professional

Development and how we can do it. Our thought piece comes from Rusul Alrubail in Canada. In what ways can we support our English language learners? Rusul gives us 9 very useful tips – to be printed and hung in every staffroom!

Do you remember your favourite teacher? How did you learn – and how do you help your students learn? Andy Yarahmadi tells us more in his article, which has been kindly given to us from ELTAS (English Language Teachers Association of Stuttgart) and Editor Jennie Wright. Culture in the classroom is a very important topic and students love talking about countries they have visited. How easy is it for them to talk about their own country? Not an easy feat, says

Hana Tichá from the Czech Republic –

she takes us into her classroom and shares ideas about how she does it with her students!

We are once again very fortunate to have a wonderful book review by Christina Chorianopoulou from Greece, and as always, another very interesting article from our regular columnist Dimitris Primalis from Greece – lots of ideas on how to incorporate creativity into our classes.

We wish you a lovely rest of 2016 and we look forward to collaborating with you on articles, getting your feedback and also any new ideas you may have! Happy reading!

My warmest wishes,

Vicky Loras
BELTA Bulletin Editorial Officer

CPD – Yes you can!

Clare Fielder

Continuous professional development, CPD, is a concept that sounds so big. Some teachers think it's beyond their reach, or at least something they haven't got time for. This article summarises my CPD posts on www.ClaresELTCompendium.wordpress.com, with the aim of encouraging more ELT teachers to get active in their CPD by showing how easy it can be!

I see CPD as any activity that enhances your skills, knowledge, or understanding of any aspect of your work. I distinguish four key stages that such an activity might have:

Reflect — Plan —
Act — Evaluate

If you approach the easy-to-do activities below with this reflective framework in mind, they will all be valuable for you and your CPD journey!

1) Blogs

Reading blog posts and considering how these apply to your own teaching, discovering new activities, ideas, or engaging in debates – it all helps you develop a further insight and expertise. There are several well-known blogs you might like to start with:

<http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com>

<http://david-crystal.blogspot.de/>

<http://teacherrebootcamp.com/>

These are rather general, though, and there are countless blogs on more specific ELT topics (e.g. Business English, YLs, ESP), which might be more relevant for your context. A Google search will provide you with what you're looking for. Once you've found a few that you like, make sure you "subscribe" to receive updates on their new posts.

2) Reflection Groups & Learning Networks

In a Reflection Group, colleagues meet (semi-)regularly to discuss and reflect together. I find giving it a name helps participants feel they have done something constructive, rather than just 'having a chat'. You can make your get-togethers as in/formal as desired, providing the atmosphere is supportive and you can all share your experiences, questions, and ideas. To get meetings started, it can help to propose some guiding questions, or take turns presenting a problem/discussion topic, etc.

Your reflection group can form a part of your "Personal Learning Network" (PLN), consisting of colleagues who provide each other with support (can you say that? I am not sure, I would rather say 'who support each other and give professional advice) and professional advice. Nowadays, many people use "PLN" to refer to an online group, which you can develop through ...

- blogs
- Twitter (Follow me @Clare2ELT)

- social networks like Facebook
- professional networking sites like Xing.com or LinkedIn
- English teaching sites such as teachingenglish.org.uk

3) Magazines & Journals

Some of the best-known magazines for finding out what's happening in ELT are Modern English Teacher (which "keeps you up-to-date with the latest developments and trends in ELT theory and thinking", and Humanising Language Teaching Magazine, "a magazine on the web for English teachers looking for ideas and interested in teacher development"). There's also EL Gazette, a free "newspaper for English language and international education".

If you're interested in the theoretical or research sides of things, two go-to journals are:

ELT Journal, which "links the everyday concerns of practitioners with insights gained from relevant academic disciplines such as applied linguistics, education, psychology, and sociology."

TESOL Quarterly, which "fosters inquiry into English language teaching and learning by providing a forum for TESOL professionals to share their research findings and explore ideas and relationships in the field."

There are also numerous more specific journals, and you can

always use Google Scholar to find articles, many of which are free, on any specific aspect of ELT that interests you.

4) Peer Observation

Observing peers shows you what actually happens in colleagues' classrooms and provides a more concrete basis for reflections regarding your own teaching, rather than abstract descriptions of teaching practices in textbooks; and is much more authentic than the ideal scenarios you might otherwise be led to imagine when thinking about other teachers' lessons.

Likewise, being observed and getting feedback from colleagues might offer fresh perspectives on your teaching. You could ask observers just to describe what happened; hearing how someone else saw your lesson might prompt some self-reflection! If you'd prefer a slightly more evaluative approach, aim to stay constructive when receiving and giving feedback.

To make peer observation effective, it's important to have something to base the post-observation discussion on. I'd suggest you choose a focus for the observations before you start. Peer observation opens up the communication about your teaching practices, and that is developmentally very beneficial for all of you!

5) Professional Organisations

Some networking and sharing of ideas beyond your immediate context is key to professional

development, and can be achieved by joining an organization such as:

IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language)

IATEFL has been a constant source of inspiration and CPD opportunities for me. Members receive the bimonthly newsletter, a copy of Conference Selections from the annual conference, free membership in a Special Interest Group with newsletters and events, cheaper subscriptions to some big journals, and a cheaper registration rate for the annual conference. They also host free monthly webinars.

TESOL International Association

They see themselves as a "global and collaborative community committed to creating a world of opportunity through teaching English to speakers of other languages." If you visit their website you see their wide variety of services and activities. If you take the time to click through, you will definitely find something that is relevant for you.

6) Seminars & Workshops

At certain stages of your career, taking a training course can help make significant progress as an ELT teacher. Teachers just starting an ELT career could consider:

- Cambridge English's Teacher Knowledge Test
- Trinity College's Cert TESOL

- Cambridge English CELTA

Teachers with some experience might consider:

- Cambridge English In-Service Certificate in English Language Teaching
- Cambridge English DELTA
- Trinity College's Dip TESOL

These are internationally recognised qualifications, what clearly is an advantage. The main disadvantages are that they can be expensive, and you usually have to find accredited examination centres to be able to complete them. They are also pretty general in scope and may not always be directly relevant to your teaching situation.

What you might like to do then, is find something closer to home. For example, your local university might offer relevant seminar courses, or publishers might offer workshops on implementing their materials. Some local/national professional organisations, like BELTA, host one-day workshops or seminars, too. There are also distance-learning courses, e.g. by The Open University, and numerous online courses and webinars that you can join, e.g. on www.futurelearn.com or www.evosections.pbworks.com

7) Conferences

There are so many reasons why attending a conference gives your CPD a boost. Here are just a few:

- networking with like-minded people
- keeping up-to-date with trends and developments
- gathering ideas and materials for the classroom
- getting involved in current debates
- growing understanding of ELT in a wider context
- sharing your own ideas or research

With so many ELT conferences, though, participating in them all would devour ridiculous amounts of time and money! When selecting a conference to attend, and in setting yourself some aims, I'd

suggest employing the framework I mentioned earlier:

Reflect — Plan —
Act — Evaluate

Reflect on areas of your teaching you'd like to develop, plan which conference to attend and which talks/workshops. Then attend, and evaluate how helpful it was, how you can apply what you have heard/learnt to your own work, and how you could develop further. Once you're in this cycle, you can continue developing professionally.

This article was first published in the ELTAF Newsletter, Summer Issue, pages 24-27.

About Clare

Clare Fielder works as an EAP lecturer and teacher trainer at Trier University, Germany. She has an MA in German and Translation, as well as the Trinity TESOL Diploma. Her key interests are teaching methodologies, translation studies and EAP. The main strain of her own CPD, her blog, can be found at <http://clareseltcompendium.wordpress.com>

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Find out more at www.beltabelgium.com/webinars

Thought Piece

9 Tips to Support English Language Learners Rusul Alrubail

If you are teaching English Language Learners, here are some tips and strategies that you can practice in the classroom to create a safe environment and support the students throughout their learning process:

1. Speak slower, not louder: Students need to process the words separately and form an understanding, for ELL students this requires some extra time. Speaking louder doesn't help and in fact sounds condescending.

2. Make sure to pause frequently and write out instructions on the board: This gives time for students to think about the instructions and ask questions if they have any. Use the pause time to write the information on the board in case a student has misheard a word or a sentence.

3. Provide short instructions, preferably starting with action verbs, ex: "Write 5 adjectives to describe the main character". Long instructions overwhelm ELL students, as they will probably need to look up a few vocabulary words, as well as process chunks of information. Short instructions with action verbs are clear and concise.

4. Write key vocabulary on a word wall: The space will create a safe environment for ELL students to ask questions about unfamiliar vocabulary and as a result build their confidence in speaking and practicing their oral communication in the classroom.

5. Check for student understanding frequently: Do not ask "do you understand/is that clear?" Do ask

questions about content/instruction: "will you present today or tomorrow?" "Is this list in the correct order?"

By asking the latter students usually will default to "yes we understand". Instead, go over the material again and summarize it in the form of questions. By doing this you will see that students will start answering together and even explaining tasks/concepts to their classmates. This creates a safe and open culture in the classroom to ask questions.

6. Provide visual guides, and/or infographics: Visuals act as a supplement for unfamiliar vocabulary words as well as concepts. Using them will also support different learning styles in the classroom.

7. Use body language and gestures to express appropriate words: Don't be afraid to do this! Body language and gestures can help in explaining words, activities and even concepts.

8. Do not correct with negative expressions: For example, "No the verb seen is incorrect." Instead model correct usage, "Yes, that's true! We see things differently." Many ELL students are very shy, because they're afraid to make mistakes when speaking. By modeling correct communication skills you will be encouraging students to continue to practice their oral communication skills in a safe space free of judgment.

9. Avoid idiomatic expressions and/or sarcasm: These expressions can be confusing for

ELL students to understand, because the meaning behind them is figurative as opposed to literal. Sarcastic expressions are especially misunderstood and often taken literally. That is because some cultures do not use sarcasm, and as a result the meaning is lost in translation. However, ELL students love learning about English idioms so devoting a class solely for idioms is encouraged and can be lots of fun!

This post was originally published on Edutopia and afterwards on Rusul's blog.

About Rusul:

Rusul Alrubail works on literacy and student voice The Writing Project. She is also an education writer, and a student voice advocate. She has taught English composition and literature to high school, college, and undergraduate students for 10 years. She has written with Edutopia, Education Week, The Guardian, PBS Newshour, EdWeek Teacher, Teaching Tolerance, ASCD's Educational Leadership, Edsurge, Annenberg Learner Foundation, Medium and others.

She's a TEDx speaker and a social media influencer on education, race and equity. Her work focuses on teacher professional development and training, pedagogical practices in and out of the classroom, English language learners, equity & social justice and media literacy as a means for professional development. You can get in touch with her at: rusul@thewritingproject.org and she blogs at <https://rusulalrubail.com/>

Don't teach me! Help me learn

Andy Yarahmadi

If you ask your next student what made them successful in any specific subject at school, the chance you'll hear things like it was a fantastic book or handouts is very low. Instead, you'll probably hear: "It was Ms. Kerry; she always made everything look so easy to understand and motivated me".

Teaching and learning happen in an amazing way. I personally don't really believe in the word 'teaching' but think that simply by 'facilitating' learners to merely step into the path where they can get where they want, you have done your job quite well. It is really surprising to see how much time many teachers spend to come up with the 'best' lesson plan, supplementary materials in the form of handouts, clips, games, etc. and then at the end of the day the learner doesn't feel they are there. Even though we cannot deny the impact of all those elements, the question is: "Is this how students learn and keep learning?" Don't forget that students are the last to blame when learning doesn't happen. In order for learning to be born, we need to make sure that learners find the right environment to go through these simple baby steps.

A sense of belonging

Your learner should feel they are accepted and there is empathy in the air. Being able to 'create' relationships among learners is a pivotal part of teaching. This is something most of us forget because we are drowned with the material we

prepared the night before. Learners should be assured of the fact that the person standing in front of them is capable of smiling, communicating and motivating. You so often see language classes in which there is a tremendous gap between the learners and the trainer. This gap results in the class quality deteriorating from something "different" or "wow that was amazing" to "mediocre". Mediocrity is killing our academic society – including our learners.

A sense of engagement

Every student is active and engaged who explores language with body, mind and senses. Yes, that's right 'senses'. They sense it when the classroom atmosphere is military or the teacher is unable to deliver so much in so little time. You learn when you like, it's that simple. Many have come to me saying: "we simply hated English at school but now find it quite interesting in your class". The rule is very plain; make them feel like they count. For me, I feel you learn best when you do. Imagine a time when you are new in a city, you wander around and get lost. The exact same thing happens when learning a new language. The worst thing that can happen in a language class is when learners don't feel that their presence in the class has any effect on their peers. Think back. How many times were you in a class, event or a foreign country and you had no clue what the teacher, presenter, guy on the street is talking about

so you turned to your buddy next to you and asked: "what is he talking about?" and then when they explained you managed to understand the whole deal? Does that happen in your class? If not, do you think it is because you explain everything so amazingly clearly?

A sense of expression

Very simple. You know it when you can show it. When you can teach it to me. The highest peak of learning is when your student can teach it to someone else. Then you can say they have learned it so well they can't forget it. In a class in which students cannot express themselves freely, openly and without thinking twice about what to say, learning will not occur. Something very important here is that those who have learned don't necessarily follow patterns and drills but are capable of creating them. They can recognize complex situations and then come up with the right linguistic instrument to solve their problems. You are not the one who makes them talk, but the one that 'facilitates' their speaking. They choose what to say and you follow and guide through. So stop exposing them to boring stuff from a book YOU found interesting and let THEM come up with what they can find intriguing in expressing themselves. Can I say it more simply?

After all, learning is a process that takes time, courage and creativity.

In order for it to happen, teachers need to be spontaneous, easy-going, well informed and fun. If these aren't yet there, maybe it's time for us to start 'learning'?

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school."

Albert Einstein

About Andy:

Andy was born in Brooklyn, NYC from a Persian father and an American mom. He graduated from the City University of New York in Linguistics and Language Teaching. After working as a language teacher and cultural facilitator at the New York Intercultural Center, he decided it was time for a change and moved to Germany.

Brainstorming by Gerhard Erasmus and Hall Houston *Book Review by Christina Chorianopoulou*

How can we make our instruction engaging and meaningful? How can we guide our students through learning and acquiring the skills necessary for their future? Two questions that always lead me to research, to learn, to pursue skills for myself.

When *Brainstorming* by Gerhard Erasmus and Hall Houston came in front of me, my thoughts flew to the words of Ray Bradbury: "Life is trying things to see if they work". I find that the principle of trial and error works for almost any occasion and is by far the most rewarding process when combined with reflection, so this book gave the perfect opportunity to try things out with learners at various levels - where would this lead?

Brainstorming is indeed a well-known and much appreciated technique in our field nowadays, and for a good reason. As the authors rightfully point out, however, there needs to be a clear objective; we brainstorm in order to get more, better, workable ideas for the issue at hand, not simply for the sake of it. Even when we use brainstorming as a filler activity, we need to have a clear purpose, or more precisely, the learners need to have a purpose in doing it. The step-by-step guides in the first section of the book are very helpful, especially for teachers who haven't used brainstorming in their classes before, as they cover not only the process of brainstorming but also the Troubleshooting, suggestions on what

to do when things don't run as smoothly as one would hope (and, yes, that happens very often).

Having experienced how brainstorming works with Young Adult and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes, who are more or less used to it as part of their profession or studies, this book made me think that my teenage and elementary learners were missing out on something great. Why not try exploring the suggested activities with them? What emerged from this process was once again the significance of collaboration, how both individually and collectively processing and evaluating an idea and how this mulling over of concepts and perspectives can lead to effective language learning

and use. Out of the activities suggested in the book, Rolestorming was the absolute favourite among learners at all levels; the element of active participation plays a significant part, as learners physically and mentally bring themselves into a situation and try to predict and explore their own and others' reactions to the given statement or scenario.

Skeleton and In Time and Space activities were also quite popular, while the PMI and Collaborative Writing suggestions were the least appreciated - after watching recorded sessions, it was obvious that having a lot or very little to write down caused some stress and anxiety among learners and directly led to dismissing the importance of the process and looking for something more interesting to work on.

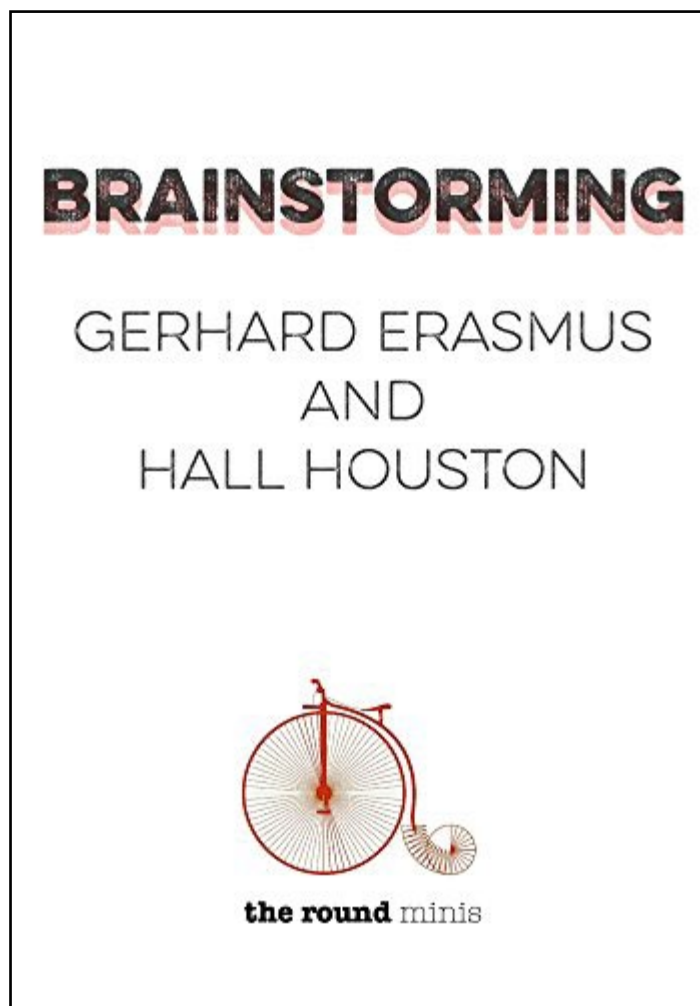
There is also one vital point clearly, yet not as sufficiently I feel, made in the book - the teacher's role in the brainstorming activities. Our own involvement as educators has to be clear-cut as well; with younger learners, we will certainly lead the brainstorming process much more actively than with older or more advanced ones - and this role needs to be obvious from the beginning. While teaching more advanced learners, we should appreciate, even celebrate to an extent, the fact that we are not leading them into anything - we simply allow them to take the lead and remain as observers and facilitators of the learning emerging in our class.

Working through the book's several suggested activities for the

past few months reminded me of how important it is to give space to the learners to find their own way in learning and, feeling somewhat apprehensive towards using Brainstorming with younger learners, it took a long time and meticulous observation to conclude yet again that trying something out is the sole, 100% certain way of knowing that something works.

Gerhard Erasmus and Hall Houston's Brainstorming is a highly recommended read for every educator out there; it will get you thinking, moving and practising - and it will remind you that even though a path to walk on has to be clear and planned, it is the unexpected twists on the road that will lead you and your learners to

extraordinary journeys and discoveries.



About Christina

Christina is an EFL/GFL teacher from Greece, working for over fifteen years with students of all ages, in a variety of contexts. After a few years in Primary education, her true passion came forward and she dedicated her life to teaching and learning languages. As a lifelong learner, her efforts are focused on creating a safe and productive environment for all her students, while passing on to them her own love for learning.

She blogs at MyMathima and shares on @kryftina.

Punctuation...? by User Design

Book Review by James Taylor

I often think that that punctuation errors by students are ignored by teachers, but this is a temptation which must be resisted. It's very easy to consider vocabulary and grammar the priority, and while I would agree with that, it doesn't have to come at the expense of form. If the students are writing in the first place, they need to understand that in a professional capacity, which is how most students will use their writing abilities in English, poor writing can create a lasting and damaging impression.

So you can imagine how pleased I was when I had the opportunity to get my hands on the book *Punctuation...?* by User Design. The book is a handy and accessible guide to the rules of punctuation, accompanied by witty and original illustrations.

Each chapter describes how dif-

ferent punctuation marks, from the often confusing apostrophe to the underemployed semicolon, are used in text that clearly and directly explains the rules. As a teacher, I particularly appreciated the straightforward nature of the descriptions and in this respect the book is an excellent resource for teachers who wish to have a quick and easy reference for checking students work and explaining the functions and use of punctuation marks to their students.

I also enjoyed some of the more esoteric punctuation marks described. These include the pilcrow, guillemets and the interpunct. Admittedly, these aren't very useful for your everyday teacher, but if you're a bit of a word nerd, you'll find them interesting.

What sets the book apart from

other reference books are the illustrations. Each entry is accompanied by a series of humorous drawings which provide the reader with an amusing visual representation of the rules and examples in the text. I especially enjoyed the apostrophe snakes and the colon footballers, but any of the David Shrigley or Spike Milligan-esque figures with their long noses and longer limbs are a part of the unique look of the book.

All in all, I'd recommend *Punctuation...?* as a handy guide for teachers who need a convenient guide to that most underrated aspect of English writing, punctuation.

For more information on *Punctuation...?* go to <http://userdesignillustrationandtypesetting.com/books/punctuation/index.html>



About James:

James Taylor, originally from Brighton, UK, has taught English as a foreign language to adults and teenagers in Brazil, South Korea, Belgium and Costa Rica. He now teaches and mentors for Cultura Inglesa in Brasília, Brazil, and is the former President and a co-founder of BELTA.

He's also a very active member of the online ELT community, and you can also find him moderating #ELTchat, a weekly discussion on Twitter with teachers from around the world, producing the TEFL Commute podcast, mentoring teachers for iTDi, blogging and presenting at conferences, online and offline.

A fresh look at teaching... with Dimitris Primalis

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.

A tad of creativity to spice up your class

Ever had any of those moments when your students feel bored and no matter what you do, none of the good old tricks stimulates any interest? This can be attributed to a number of reasons. However, a very common cause is that the lesson might lack a necessary ingredient to involve learners: creativity.

Creativity?

I think I can read your mind now: "Creativity? In what sense? Isn't that time consuming? How will I

integrate it into the syllabus?"

Creative and Critical Thinking skills are an integral part of the 21st Century skills so there is no need for you to worry. Also, encouraging student creativity can easily be combined with language skills development and motivation of learners to be actively involved. It also entails an element of personalization which is much sought after in modern classrooms.

How can I do it?

You can take advantage of two techniques: giving life to inanimate objects and changing roles.

What if I don't have extra time in class to do it?

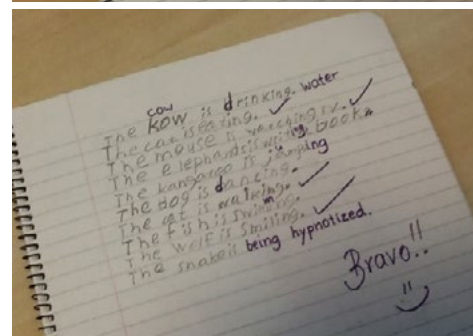
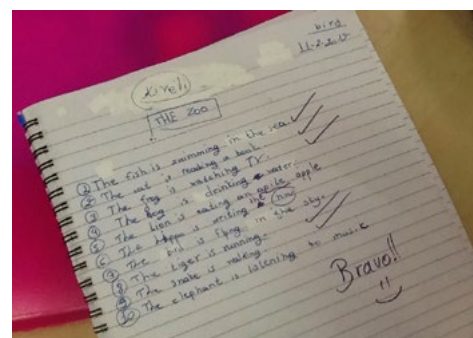
A tweak in traditional activities may do the trick. Below you can read about some activities that can motivate your young learners – and older ones – and inspire creativity.

1. A different zoo (A1 CEFR level)

Draw 2-3 animals on the board doing unusual activities e.g. an elephant reading a book, a wild cat watching TV etc.

Tell students this is not an ordinary zoo. Ask them to describe what the animals are doing in this different zoo. Elicit one or two answers and write the sentences on the board so that students have an example. Then ask them to imagine what the other animals are doing.

Below you can see some samples of what students can come up with.



2. A day in the life of a monster (A1 CEFR Level)

When teaching the Simple Present, the most challenging part is to help students practice the "s" in the third person singular. Describing their mother's or father's routine is a dull task and students are often reluctant to write about it. How about trying "A day in the life of their pet monster or alien"?

Write a model with a couple of sentences on the board and then let them draw their own monster and write the sentences. You can allow them to color them at home and edit their work so that they can post some of them on the school's blog. The response in my class has been unexpectedly enthusiastic.

A tad of creativity to spice up your class



3. My version of the story (A1- C2 CEFR Levels)

If the school has a library, give them a guided tour and regularly invite them to talk about the book they have read in class (graded readers). Ask them to borrow a book and change the roles of the characters. Give them an example: "Have you read the big bad wolf and the three little pigs?" What if the three little pigs are not as good as they seem to be? What if the wolf is not as bad as it seems?

Invite them to write a story based on the book they have read but they need to change roles or the plot so that they can create their own version of the story. First, they write a draft. Then, edit it together and finally, they can illustrate it using their color markers and pencils. You will be pleasantly surprised by the creativity and hard work of your students!

4. Holiday snapshots (A2- C2 CEFR Levels)

Teenagers, teachers and quite often younger learners take photos during their holidays. Project in class one of your photos with an inanimate object and ask them to think of what this object may have witnessed. This is also known as the association principle (Maley 2016). Invite them to work in groups and

come up with one or two paragraphs. Then share their paragraphs by reading them aloud in class. If every group has a tablet, assign the role of secretary – one student per group- and ask them to give you their story in a digital form. It can be done through email or using an ordinary USB stick. You can collect them, copy-paste them on powerpoint slides and project them in class. Assign the rest of the story as homework. Alternatively, invite them to write their own story using one of their photos as a lead-in.

Below you can see a sample of photo and the task as well as a sample written by an adult who was inspired by the photo:

"Standing at the small cafe' on top of the cliff, Henry was enjoying the breathtaking view of the

island which seemed to be the perfect holiday destination. Suddenly, a distant voice pulled his eye from the coast to his wife, who was swimming under the cliff and waving at him. Henry grabbed his camera to capture the scene. He narrowed his eyes to take a close-up shot, but what he saw turned his excitement into panic. Christine was not waving but drowning!!!"

Final thoughts

Even though a routine in class can make students feel comfortable, appealing to their creativity and modifying common tasks to make them more personalized, can stimulate interest and boost student involvement in a lesson.

Enjoy the activities!



A perspective that might surprise you...

Hana Tichá

If you ask Czech students to talk about their own country, they don't normally jump in excitement. One of the reasons is that students are convinced that it's not important to talk/learn about the things (they think) they already know. Additionally, Czechs often see their native land as totally boring; they tend to show negative attitudes towards Czech culture, politics, people and their lifestyle in general.

However, I believe that being able to talk about one's country unbiasedly is one of the essential skills a language learner should acquire because, after all, one usually uses English to talk about their country with foreigners (that is, potential visitors, customers, investors, and so on). So for one, it's bad publicity if you defame your country (no matter what Oscar Wilde declared about bad publicity). Moreover, and more importantly, when you only focus on the negative, you'll inevitably end up being out of ideas very soon - not good for a potential examinee, right?

I should stress that this post was inspired by the following bit from another post:

A final podcast recommendation is a site that is not very active at the moment, but has great potential, Bomb English. This site is two (very well-educated) foreigners living in Korea. They are both fluent in Korean and Korean culture, but they are native

speakers of English. They offer a perspective on Korea that might surprise you.

For some reason, when reading Mike's post, specifically the red bit above, I suddenly remembered a YouTube channel called Geography Now, which my students love watching as an addition to the materials they are required to study when preparing for their final state exam in English.

On this channel, they cover lots of countries, but in the lessons, we usually focus on the English speaking ones. However, they have recently included the Czech Republic. As the Czech Republic is one of the final exam topics, we decided to check it out. And it was a huge success. I myself found this video much more engaging than the ones about all the foreign countries. Why?

Well, probably because I was on the lookout for the things/places/facts I:

1. already knew
2. didn't know (and was surprised by)
3. had forgotten and remembered again
4. could agree with
5. wanted/had to disagree with.

But most importantly, I was curious about the way foreigners present the Czech Republic and particularly, and this is the funniest part, how the native English speakers pronounce all

the difficult Czech names - spoiler: they did really well!

This, obviously, inspired a lot of interesting discussions in class and opened new horizons for many students, myself included.

Well, there are always perspectives that may surprise you!

About Hana

Hana is an EFL teacher with more than 20 years of experience with learners of all ages. She holds a BA degree in teaching English as a foreign language to young learners, and an MA degree in TESOL from Masaryk University in Brno, in the Czech Republic. She loves thought-provoking discussions on ELT topics, education and (applied) linguistics. Hana is passionate about social media and the plethora of possibilities they offer, and is constantly seeking opportunities to develop professionally, especially through blogging and connecting with her PLN.

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