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*Includes materials designed to photocopy*
This is the issue of ETp which will be given to delegates at the IATEFL conference in Manchester, UK, at the beginning of April. What better example could there be of the collaborative nature of the English teaching profession than this conference, at which thousands of teachers gather to share ideas and offer each other support and encouragement?

In our main feature, Deak Kirkham looks at one of the ways in which teachers regularly help and support their colleagues: the in-service teacher development session. He takes a critical look at current practice and suggests ways in which these sessions could be made more useful and more attractive to the participants.

Michelle Shin describes how she fosters collaboration amongst her students – not just by giving them group assignments, but by actively equipping them with the skills they need to take part in team-based activities. In the multicultural context of her classes, this pays dividends in both teaching the students the important life skill of working with others, and also in forging friendships across cultural divides.

Daniela Incze is also keen on getting her students to work collaboratively. She teaches young learners, so she is setting up good habits for their future lives.

Teachers who would like to see their students contributing to group projects might like to take a look at Russell Stannard’s Webwatcher column, in which he describes Padlet, an ideal tool for creating online ‘corkboards’ to which students can add text, videos and illustrations. For those who want to try a ready-made exercise in collaboration with their students, the photocopiable activity at the end of the Scrapbook is one that involves the use of teamwork to reconstruct a photo.

Of course, there is a fine line to be drawn between good healthy collaboration and less desirable manifestations of the urge to work with others. Michael Morgan addresses the uncomfortable subject of student plagiarism – a kind of unconsenting collaboration on the part of the original author whose work is copied and pasted into the plagiarist’s essay! For Michael Morgan, the key is not to punish students for plagiarism, but to actively teach them to reject it for themselves and to encourage them to have the confidence to express their ideas and thoughts in their own words.
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At the risk of being brutally honest and, dare I say it, giving offence, there's a not infrequent elephant in the teacher development room. Here goes (deep breath): not all teacher development sessions develop teachers! There, I've said it (and I think some heads at least are nodding). So, what do I mean?

Development or elopement?

Over a decade's worth of personal experience and a smorgasbord rich in anecdotal evidence, I feel I can make the brave claim that, with some exceptions, TD sessions tend to offer the mundane, the over-familiar, the uncontroversial and the prosaic. We are quick, are we not, in our profession, to revisit perhaps a touch too frequently such 'gems' as authentic versus inauthentic materials, ways to teach pronunciation and adapting textbooks? I've been in all those sessions, and haven't always walked out overly enlightened. Indeed, on more than one occasion, I've skipped an offered session, opting for elopement over development.

OK, if you're still reading, thanks, because I recognise that the preceding paragraph was none too commendatory about the state of ELT. Most of the rest of this article will take a turn for the positive; in fact, as the title suggests, I'll be talking about a way out of the alleged platitude-soup in which some TD sessions invite attendees to slowly drown. But first, some analysis: if I'm right, or at least not completely wrong, why is this the case? Why do we (sometimes) aim low – and still miss? Here are a few possible explanations:

- **Inclusivity**
  TD sessions want to include as many people as possible, and this is a right and noble aim. But to that end, perhaps we're too hesitant to get technical, heavy or both. Do we wish to avoid the appearance of knowing something our colleagues don't?

- **The institutionalisation of TD**
  TD sessions are often, alas, scheduled. Maybe this engenders a sense of having to set up a session, even where perhaps no session is needed. Just because it's the second Friday of the month doesn’t necessitate a gathering of colleagues. Instead of the scheduled TD approach, I think ad hoc is the way forward: when someone has something to say, others may want to listen. But not unless or until. More on this below.

- **Round table discussions**
  These can often work well, even when the table isn’t round. I have frequently
found the democratic, open dynamic of the round table enlightening. Its sub-text of openness invites disagreement, and colleagues often feel they can challenge and joust. The topic must be picked with care, however, for anecdotes-ville lies just around the corner.

The magic of tribalism
All organisations need to maintain a sense of communal identity, and when teachers spend most of their time working alone in classrooms, perhaps TD sessions are a psychological balm, soothing the breast of colleagues who see the profession as a community. There are a few teachers, I think, who (like many academics) prefer to see themselves as self-employed; but most like to feel part of a big teaching family and the TD session is more about social sellotaping than cerebral stimulation.

Expert-led TD sessions
So, those were a few ideas for reasons why we don’t often walk on the wild side in our TD sessions. Now, admittedly, TD sessions are rarely going to be original (and nor should they be – that’s research and it belongs to a different world). But the absence of originality doesn’t imply the necessity of repetition. So it’s time for a constructive suggestion: the expert-led TD session.

I recently conducted a TD session which I would describe as expert-led and, after encouraging feedback from the attendees, I am about to lead another. What follows is what I did and the background to it. The background first.

Background
For reasons outside the scope of this article, I had become interested in the interaction between written corrective feedback (WCF) and grammar. There is a long tradition associated with this nexus, going back a good few decades but given new life and vivacity in 1996 in an article by John Truscott entitled ‘The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes’. In that article, Truscott famously claimed that WCF is, at best, useless for grammar acquisition, and at worst, detrimental to student progress (he didn’t include other types of WCF, ie on lexis, spelling, paragraphing, etc).

This startling article kick-started what is now nearly two decades of passionate research (including at least three books and many articles), most of which sought to disprove Truscott’s thesis. (I would say that the jury is still out – but, in my view, the balance of probabilities lies with Dr Truscott.) Anyway, I’d been reading all this material – pretty much everything written on WCF and grammar development – and so I thought, ‘Why not lead a TD session on it?’

I developed a lengthy questionnaire, 14 pages of a series of questions on all manner of WCF and grammar learning related matters, structured into sections such as ‘preliminaries’, ‘focus of feedback’, ‘means of feedback’ and ‘feedback policies’. Some examples of individual questions are shown in the box above.

Session
There was a lot of material, and it took a long time to prepare. When it was ready, I emailed it to a number of colleagues who I thought would be interested, and those who were interested (all of them, happily) were invited to meet, to discuss the questions raised. We did so, talked for 90 minutes and then went back to our lives. However, according to the feedback received, those 90 minutes were felt to be energetic and engaging, with a great deal of peer-teaching and learning taking place. The session felt as if it had a different dynamic: there was a lot more to be said than time allowed. Finally but crucially, despite having read and written a great deal, my role in the session was minimal: the participants talked and argued at length, guided by the questions and occasional comments made by me. In contrast to the usual ‘presenter talk time’, a practice much maligned when done in classrooms by teachers, this was collaborative, participant-led discussion.

Reflection
The TD session described above can be characterised as expert-led: one of the

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**E: Student uptake / processing of feedback**

*Uptake might be defined as ‘a task undertaken by students in order to process feedback meaningfully and allow the potential for learning’.*

What tasks, if any, do you usually use to promote learning from uptake? The following (non-comprehensive) list offers some possible uptake tasks:

- conference with the teacher;
- making notes of the errors identified, and correcting them;
- discussing errors with a fellow student;
- rewriting the task;
- writing a report on the task.

**F: Feedback contexts**

F1 To what extent, if any, do you feel that a student’s educational and cultural background influences their expectations of feedback?

F2 How, if at all, do you (endeavour to) respond to that?
Developing teacher development

Participants (in this case, myself) had read and understood a significant amount about an area relevant to language teaching, had prepared a lengthy questionnaire document to guide discussion and had invited those with an interest in the field to participate. This characterisation differs somewhat from an open-forum, scheduled, bring-and-share or article-discussion-style TD session. The fact that an expert has taken the time to get to know a subject allows a questionnaire to be created which itself offers depth, breadth, motivation and choice to the attendees. Depth and breadth emerge from the ‘expert’ preparation; motivation arises because the attendees recognise that there is genuine content here; and choice manifests itself through the length and complexity of the questionnaire. As mentioned above, the session then becomes the participants’, not the session leader’s. Result!

In my view, this expert-led, questionnaire style of TD session has much to commend it. It can be adapted to any topic area, two people can collaborate, and it invites multiple sessions on the same topic, as opposed to the piecemeal, one-off feel that I think is characteristic of many TD sessions. Finally, of course, for the expert who puts in the time and effort to create this event, a great deal of knowledge and professional and personal development are to be gained. So everyone wins, and everyone learns: teacher development developing teachers.

Truscott, J ‘The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes’ Language Learning 46 (2) 1996

Deak Kirkham has been enjoying planet Earth for nearly four decades, latterly in the company of both a cat and a wife. He likes politics and reading Yeats but, when time allows, he teaches English for academic purposes.

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Enlightening Spiritual Enlightenment Efl.researcher.deak@gmail.com

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I’d like to start this article with a simple exercise. I recorded two pairs of students from different classes doing a problem-solving activity, similar to the ones in the Speaking tests in the Cambridge English exams. The conversations are transcribed below. All you have to do is read and match them to the level of the students. It shouldn’t take you too long.

To help you, I will tell you that one pair are upper-intermediate-level students from Japan and Spain and the other pair, from Spain and Italy, are advanced-level.

**Conversation 1**

**Student 1** What do you think about this watch? I think he is going to be chuffed with it. It looks good, and everybody needs a watch.

**Student 2** That’s a good idea, but everybody has a mobile nowadays and you could easily check the time on your mobile, couldn’t you? You don’t really need a watch. Do you know what I mean?

**Student 1** That’s true! Actually, I’m not sure he wears watches, does he?

**Student 2** I don’t know. How about a book about London? It’s colourful, fun …

**Student 1** That sounds interesting!

**Student 2** … and he told me he loves reading.

**Student 1** There you go! I guess that’s the perfect present for him, to be honest with you, because …

**Conversation 2**

**Student 1** What do you think about a book?

**Student 2** Yes, it’s good. I think it’s useful as well.

**Student 1** I agree with you.

(pause)

**Student 2** I think the watch is a good idea because he doesn’t have a watch. Do you agree with me?

**Student 1** Yes. Yes. It’s good. So, what do you think: the book or the watch?

**Student 2** I think the watch is more useful.

**Student 1** Yes.

**Student 2** But the book is cheaper. What do you think?

**Student 1** Yes, so let’s buy the book. We are students. We don’t have much money.

**Student 2** Yes, I agree.

Before you make a decision, look at the language used in both conversations and think about the range of vocabulary and structures and the appropriacy of the language, and imagine the interaction between the students, based on what you read. Got an answer? Good!

William Chaves Gomes recommends rules for getting real results.
Higher doesn’t mean better

If you matched Conversation 1 to the advanced students, you are, unfortunately, sadly mistaken. In fact, that was what my upper-intermediate students came up with. But surely Conversation 1 looks more advanced: we can see a variety of language structures, very natural spoken expressions and appropriate turn-taking. What happened to the advanced couple? Were they just bad students? Not at all! I have noticed that the vast majority of advanced students, and even those who have taken and passed the Cambridge Proficiency exam, have an excellent understanding of grammar, to the point of being able to recite all the rules and exceptions of a given structure. Their knowledge of collocations and idioms is equally amazing, and they can talk and, most of the time, write about anything and everything. However, when they speak, they still tend either to cling to simpler language or resort to more formal language whatever the context, which is grammatically correct but perhaps not always appropriate. Have a look at these examples which I have collected in my classrooms over the years:

‘William, can I pop to the loo?’
(a B2 student)

‘Teacher, may I go to the bathroom?’
(a C2 student)

‘I take the Tube to come to school.’
(B1)

‘I always go on the London underground station and take the train to school.’
(C2)

(The student makes a sound they use in their L1 to give time to think)

‘I think it is a very good idea.’
(C2)

‘Well actually, I think it’s a good idea.’
(B2)

‘Do you know what I mean?’
(B2)

‘Do you understand?’
(C2)

I’m obviously not implying that B1/B2 students are more proficient speakers than C1/C2 students. The reason why their language in the examples above, and in Conversation 1 at the beginning of this article, seems more natural is because they knew that that was what I expected from them. They used this kind of language because I made them go through three stages over a period of time:

1. becoming aware of and noticing this language in native-speaker speech;
2. using it mechanically at first, to please me;
3. eventually incorporating it into their everyday vocabulary in a natural way.

I call this process ‘The rule of the day’.

Natural speech

Listen to any native speaker for about five minutes and notice how many times question tags and words and expressions like actually, exactly, absolutely, do you know what I mean? and there you go! are used. You’ll be surprised. Having noticed these high-frequency words and expressions in real life, I decided to help my students, whatever their level, but especially my already excellent C1/C2 learners, to make the most of their time at school to learn not only language from coursebooks and grammar books, but also the sort of language that will better prepare them for interacting with real people in the real world.

Stage 1: Making them aware of it

What I do is to introduce one of these ‘language gambits’ and make it a focus for that day. In fact, I write ‘The rule of the day’ on one side of the board and, just below it, I put the word or expression I want them to use that day. Take actually, for example. I explain what it means and how to use it, making sure that speakers of Latin languages do not confuse it with recently or now. Then I tell the students that at some point in the lesson they have to use it so that they will sound more like a native speaker. To reinforce my point, For homework, I ask them to pretend they are examiners. I show them videos of students doing a speaking test (these are available with some coursebooks or on YouTube) and ask them to give the students grades. Students love this activity, and they come up with good comments like: ‘Candidate A used “I think” six times’ or ‘Candidate X used “actually” and “it looks as if they are” instead of “they are”, and so on.

Spanish speakers, Brazilians or Italians have a tendency to make a very long /e/ sound before speaking, to give them time to think what they want to say; this may irritate the listener. If that is the case, my rule of the day is to replace this long /e/ sound with the English ‘Erm …’ or ‘Well, erm …’. As I’ve said before, to reinforce the importance of the rule, I ask them to notice how many times English speakers make this sound when they speak. I even encourage them to ask another teacher or a bus driver how to get to a place far from where they are at that moment. The chances are that the teacher or the bus driver will have to think and consequently go ‘Erm …’. Students always report excitedly on the following day that people actually used ‘Erm …’ when asked a question. Again, in a non-English-speaking environment this can be done by watching a video or an interview on the internet.

Stage 2: Using it because it is the teacher’s rule!

On the following day, I do exactly the same: I write actually, or whatever the target word of that day is, on the board, and tell the students that is what I expect to hear from them. In the beginning, students sometimes forget to use it or don’t feel comfortable with it. I don’t penalise, punish or make them feel bad if they don’t use it. However, if they do manage to use it, I praise them and tell them how natural they sounded. As B F Skinner pointed out, behaviour which is rewarded tends to be repeated. Sometimes, I ask them at the end of the lesson if they had a chance to use the word; at other times, I ask their peers to listen to them throughout the lesson and tell me later if they used it or not. In addition, before they start a speaking task I ask: ‘What do I want to hear from you?’ They all know the answer. I also encourage them to use it outside the school with their friends.

In an exam class, I tell the students to pretend they are examiners. I show them videos of students doing a speaking test (these are available with some coursebooks or on YouTube) and ask them to give the students grades. Students love this activity, and they come up with good comments like: ‘Candidate A used “I think” six times’ or ‘Candidate X used “actually” and “it looks as if they are” instead of “they are”, and so on.

Students love this activity, and they come up with good comments like: ‘Candidate A used “I think” six times’ or ‘Candidate X used “actually” and “it looks as if they are” instead of “they are”, and so on.
The rule of the day

Stage 3: Using it naturally

At first, it is not very natural for students to incorporate the target words and expressions; it’s almost fake. However, as time goes on, these become part of their language repertoire and begin to sound very natural. I normally stick to one target expression until I notice that the students are comfortable with it. Then I stop writing it on the board, to check if they are producing it without being told to. When this happens, I give them another target: for example, to use ‘Absolutely’ or ‘Exactly’ as alternatives for ‘I agree with you’ in discussions.

Validation

In order to validate what I was doing, I did an experiment.

I teach in two different schools in London, let’s call them School A and School B. I used this technique with the students in School A who were preparing for the Cambridge First exam, but not with the students in School B, also enrolled for the same exam. When the Cambridge results were out, I noticed that a considerable number of students from School A got ‘exceptional’ in their speaking test, but there were not as many ‘exceptional’ scores for those in School B. A few months later, I had the chance to teach another FCE group in School B. This time, I did use the technique, and guess what? The number of ‘exceptional’ scores was much higher than before. Coincidence? I don’t think so.

After having used this technique for two years now with about six different classes plus some private students, I am convinced that it does have a positive impact on the students’ speaking skills. Students don’t necessarily get lower marks if they haven’t been taught with this technique, but whenever it has been used, the percentage of ‘exceptional’ scores has been higher.

My list

Some of the ‘rules of the day’ I like to set in my classes, including the ones mentioned earlier, are:

- Question tags: the students have to use tag questions x number of times in a lesson while speaking.
- ‘Actually’
- ‘Erm …’ or ‘Well, erm …’
- ‘It looks as if they are …’ instead of ‘they are …’
- ‘Exactly!’ and ‘Absolutely!’ as alternatives for ‘I agree with you’ in discussions.
- ‘Fair enough!’
- ‘There you go.’
- ‘Do you know what I mean?’ instead of ‘Do you understand?’ as this can sometimes sound rather bossy or arrogant.

It’s very important, however, to pay attention to pronunciation and intonation and to drill the target language before the students start using it. I tell my students that a flat ‘word-by-word’ pronunciation of ‘Do-you-know-what-I-mean?’ simply won’t do. They need to get the intonation right in order to sound natural. Also, if you notice that they are using the language in the wrong context, you need to stop the students and tell them how to use it correctly.

In exam classes, for example, when the students have to compare and contrast two pictures in one minute, my rule is that whatever picture they are given, they have to use:

- much more (adj) or a great deal (for example, better) instead of simple comparative forms;
- it looks as if (they are in a park because …);

(They) might be + ing;

It seems to me that …

All these structures in one minute! Obviously, I start little by little, but that’s the ultimate goal. And with practice, the students achieve it most of the time. What happens after the exam, when they are not under pressure any more, is that they start using these structures naturally in contexts other than comparing pictures.

If it’s not an exam class but I know the activity requires a certain kind of language, I make it a rule that the students have to try to fit that language in. As I mentioned before, if I don’t make it a rule and ‘force’ my students to use the target language, they tend to stick to simpler structures.

I couldn’t be happier with the results I’ve been getting since I started using this technique. It’s even more rewarding when my students tell me that their host families or people in shops and supermarkets congratulate them on their speaking skills.

Give it a go! I’m sure your students will benefit greatly.

William Chaves Gomes has been teaching and training teachers in the UK and in other countries for 19 years. He has a degree in English language and literature and the Cambridge DELTA. He also writes ELT materials and is currently working as a teacher trainer and ELT consultant in London, UK.

wichago@hotmail.com
Collaborative learning

Michelle Shin enables her students to take ownership by equipping them with team-based skills.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has identified collaborative learning as a High Impact Education Practice (HIEP) and, while this is a method that many already utilise, moving it to the forefront as an integral part of a course with clearly-defined goals and a premeditated process can benefit students through engagement, ownership and problem-solving skills.

I taught English for ten years at a public high school in Hawaii, a highly multicultural state with a constant influx of ESL and EFL students. Now I teach at Kapiolani, which has the highest population of international students of all the community colleges in Hawaii. Island residents are very proud of their diversity and everyone's ability to be part of the larger ohana (family), but there are, of course, challenges. Students sometimes group together according to ethnicity – Koreans over here, Filipinos over there – and our schools, rightly, encourage cultural identity with ethnicity-based clubs (Japanese Club, Pacific Islander Club, etc). Hawaii also has a very large military population, which means we have thousands of students who are originally from various other places in the US and the world, and who can have a very different cultural mindset. I strive to promote an atmosphere of inclusivity where we all appreciate our differences while working to build upon common bonds.

Collaborative learning is a great way to create these bridges and teach students how to respect and work with others. Writing is often viewed as a solitary process – that iconic image of a writer, alone, typing away at their computer, distanced from the world. After all, in English, papers are usually produced by single authors and the ideas ‘belong’ to one person. But writing is also a collaborative process – our ideas and the challenges that force us to strive higher come from our peers and community, the revising and drafting process is invalid without outside input, and a final product is ultimately just a sheet of paper without an audience.

I use collaborative learning in big and small forms in my lessons: activities to help explain literary terms or vocabulary, a group essay assignment, a large ‘Teach-a-short-story’ unit where the students become the teachers, a ‘Create-a-visual-argument’ piece to punctuate rhetorical analysis, etc. Groups provide a support network, the opportunity to make friends and share frustrations and triumphs, and – perhaps most importantly – to figure out the often complex, but unavoidable, skill of working with others. Like any
Collaborative learning

educational practice, however, it is not a miracle cure, and forethought is needed in order to avoid some of the more likely complications.

Identifying and overcoming obstacles

1 Group dynamics

Group members can have widely differing opinions, strengths, ideas of what constitutes participation and work ethics, and there can be personality conflicts. Sometimes someone feels that they’re trying to speak or contribute, but that they aren’t being heard. Ensuring that all group members feel respected is crucial, so investing in team-building activities at the beginning of the year, or before a long-term group project, is a good way to emphasise the fact that we need to learn to work with others. This might seem like a waste of time because it is seemingly not progressing the assigned project or paper, but investing time in community building pays future dividends and teachers can devise team-building exercises that also directly contribute to or emphasise a point of the intended group assignment. Here are some general examples of team-building exercises.

* Lego This activity teaches listening, communication and being aware of how you make requests. It also shows what can be accomplished by a team as opposed to an individual. Two volunteers each receive ten pieces of Lego and are then seated back-to-back. One student must use their Lego pieces to create a design (not a straight line) and then communicate to the other how to produce an exact replica. The student forming the replica cannot ask questions. After three minutes, the class can jump in and help direct, and the student forming the replica may ask questions.

* Same/same This activity helps students immediately connect over similarities, and forms a bridge of communication and identification. Groups have two minutes to talk and make a list of everything they have in common. Everything on the list must apply to all the members of the group. The longer the list, the better, and then it is shared with the class.

* Friendly competition Groups are given a timed competitive activity, such as building a boat out of a given amount of cardboard and tape. The boat that can hold the most pennies wins. This involves working together, problem solving and having to communicate quickly and fulfill roles under the pressure of a time limit (but not a grade).

Once groups have been formed and a project is under way, the teacher must maintain active involvement by monitoring the group dynamic. If problems arise, sometimes the solution is as simple as speaking to a group member after class; at other times, groups may need to be reassigned or reorganised.

2 Workload distribution

One of the most common student complaints is uneven workload distribution – the student who cares the most often ‘carries’ the group. First off, the students must gain the understanding that this is something that happens not just in class but in the workplace as well, and learning individual mechanisms for handling it or adapting to it is a valuable skill. However, this doesn’t mean that teachers shouldn’t do something to alleviate inequity.

I prefer to set expectations upfront in a timeline or lesson plan, produced as a pre-work stage before the main assignment begins. I give my students the requirements of what must be done according to the rubric (the task instructions), and then let the group members allocate themselves duties and tasks as part of their overall timeline worksheet or lesson plan assignment. These have two turn-in dates: an original one and a revised one, because I review the students’ suggested plans and make revisions or recommendations as necessary. This way I can monitor the equity in the distribution of work and provide suggestions for improved goals. After this, the students revise their plan, and the final one is what they are held accountable to. The students receive two grades at the end of the assignment: an individual one for their allocated tasks and an overall group grade. Both of these grades are clearly explained in the rubric so that the students can see what falls where, and I do make changes depending on the particular assignment.

3 Out-of-class scheduling and preparedness

In class, teachers can exert control. We can lean over our students and ask to see what they’ve done so far. We can give groups time to meet and plan. But bigger, long-term projects often require that the students meet outside class, and this comes with two problems: scheduling and no-shows.

Scheduling can often be solved with a required timeline done in class. Before they leave, the students have to submit their schedule for when and how they will meet outside class.

So now the meeting time is set, yet only two members show up. Or everyone attends, but most are missing their work. Now what? Having the overall grade composed of individual and group responsibilities solves part of the problem because students who don’t show up or don’t do their work will have their individual grade affected, while the others will not, but their lack of commitment still impacts the group as a whole, so it is not something that we should tolerate. For this reason, building team commitment early on through activities and icebreakers is key so that group members don’t want to disappoint each other. I routinely have students who were failing because they did not submit their individual essays, but who participate in group essays/projects because they know their behaviour affects others. Of course, I have also had students who were basically ‘no shows’ and, in a worst-case scenario, I remove them from the group and make the assignment a purely individual one for them.

In addition, I use a peer-assessment sheet (see page 13) that allows members to evaluate team member contributions. This is factored in as part of their grade as well, so all the team members are aware that team-based skills, not just the standards, are part of their overall evaluation.

4 Student ‘buy-in’

At first, students are often excited about working collaboratively, but they sometimes lose steam when the problems mentioned above arise. To persist, they need to see the real-world application for gaining these skills and have ownership over their role in the team. At the start of the year, or before group projects begin, it is a good idea to have an activity that emphasises the importance of collaborative skills in the
workforce. I have my students form small groups and then brainstorm jobs where they feel that being a team player or having team-based skills is not essential; then we write a list on the board. Next, the groups pick a job on the list and then debunk the idea that collaborative skills aren’t a necessary qualification. Students often come up with ideas involving communication, colleagues, boss–employee relationships or opportunities for promotion that I had never considered.

As for ownership in long-term group projects, I have the students set their own group member expectations during their first group meeting. These expectations and a list of roles and names are part of their pre-work timeline or lesson plan. Other teachers go one step further and allow groups to create the peer-assessment part of the rubric, as long as it adheres to certain qualifications or a set amount of points. This way, the students not only know the expectations for being a member of their team upfront, but they are more invested because they actually helped create them.

Peer assessment and feedback letters

In Hawaii, direct confrontation is commonly avoided and many people would rather bite their tongue than point out the faults of a friend or peer. However, giving and receiving constructive criticism is part of how we learn, and often the most specific and informative pieces of assessment for collaborative work come from group members – their peers – not the teacher.

Thus, to ensure that all the students have a voice in the assessment process, that team member contribution is clearly defined and that feedback is given, I require peer-assessment sheets (which only I see) to be filled out during and after the collaborative learning project. These address cooperative learning skills, team member communication, commitment and contribution, and self-directed learning. I also require each student to write a peer feedback letter for each of the other team members. The letter must address three areas: positive feedback for the individual, overall group evaluation and a specific improvement goal for the individual. This way, the students are required to give constructive feedback via an improvement goal which allows them a more culturally acceptable venue (teacher requirement!) if they feel deeply uncomfortable about giving constructive criticism to a team member. It also teaches them how to politely, but accurately, convey what a group member needs to work on.

As teachers, our main goal is for our students to gain mastery over the standards and competency skills. Collaborative learning helps attain this goal, but provides bonus perks in addition. Teamwork requires improved communication and conflict resolution skills, and students learn to heed the insight of others who, perhaps, come from different backgrounds and have a variety of different life experiences. This doesn’t mean conflicts don’t arise; in fact they probably will to a greater or lesser extent, but conflict provides an opportunity for the students to learn how to negotiate with others, stand up for themselves or relinquish control.

Critical thinking needs to be applied to the group task at hand, but often creative thinking is what can solve issues of group dynamics. Collaborative work also means learning how to plan, organise and execute a large project – beneficial skills for any person to acquire – and commonly involves an oral presentation component. But, perhaps, the most meaningful benefit for the students is the friends they make. I frequently see students who were paired up over and over during the year, or for a long-term project, stay in touch and become close friends. Learning to work with others, and gaining new and lasting friendships, is a lesson that should always be taught and which we never stop learning from.

Michelle Shin lives in Hawaii with her husband and son. She received her doctorate from the University of Hawaii, with an emphasis in creative writing and contemporary American literature, and she was a public high school teacher for ten years at Moanalua High School. She currently teaches writing at Kapiolani Community College.

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ENGLISH TEACHING professional

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We want to hear from you!

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Homework or no homework?

Over the past five years, I have developed a policy of not giving homework to my teenage students. I have also convinced myself that this is a good idea and that we are all benefiting from it: it is not just me being lazy!

I work in a private language academy in Spain, and my students – children and teenagers – are attending English classes outside normal school hours. They struggle to balance all their extra activities, school work and occasional free moments during the week. If they work with me effectively, I consider this much more efficient than spending such expensive and potentially productive time explaining, correcting, disciplining, re-checking and getting frustrated and irritated over the subject of homework.

A necessary evil?

Not setting homework can be controversial and, indeed, impossible or unavoidable in certain situations. There are also many strong arguments in favour of homework, and most teachers would agree with many, if not all, of the following:

- Students benefit from spending time outside school on language, as class work is simply not enough.
- Homework is a perfect opportunity to go over calmly what was done with the teacher, and revise, rethink, support and develop that initial input.
- Homework offers a moment for students to work as individuals and develop learner autonomy outside the classroom.
- Homework provides the opportunity to exploit more fully all the extra material we now have in textbooks, workbooks, online resources, etc.
- Students and parents expect homework to be set and to be corrected.

Nevertheless, the drawbacks and negative influence that homework may have are often overlooked. Homework is a four-letter word for many students. The very mention of it can bring sighs, boos and, occasionally, nightmares. The dream of returning to your house from school or class and not having to study or do homework is a bonus: the equivalent of coming in at night and not having to check your work emails on your smartphone or tablet!

Key issues

There are three key issues which need to be raised when dealing with the concept of homework.

Home

Firstly, there is the question of home. Often homework is not done at home at all, but at a friend’s house, on the street, on the bus on the way to class or sitting on the step outside school before it opens. What is more, all too often, for it to be done effectively at home, homework requires the participation and involvement of other adults. Parents play a crucial role in a child’s education, but they cannot always be available, for a number of very valid reasons, and a tutor’s ability to aid, guide, encourage or simply organise a son or daughter’s study may be limited in many ways. The implications are unsettling: if homework is crucial to success in class, some children have an automatic handicap, simply because their family circumstances curtail their ability to do homework properly.

Enda Scott finds good reasons to change his mind.
Work

Considering the second part of the compound noun opens up further questions. If the idea of home can be problematic, so too can the concept of work. Again, this will depend enormously on the context but, with the students I deal with, very often there is not a lot of work put in. Demands on their time and attention span and all sorts of other impositions mean homework is usually something to get out of the way, to be ticked off as done, with the exercises completed as fast as possible. It is not always seen as useful time spent developing and reinforcing what is done in class but, rather, as something quickly finished to keep the teacher at bay. It might be correct or not, copied from a friend or cut and pasted from the internet, but the important thing is that a teacher sees the exercise completed and, as a result, the task achieved: how much effort went into that result is not always appreciated or easy to evaluate and, when work clearly falls below standard, the mere fact of its having been done is often good enough. Teacher and students are happy because everyone has officially fulfilled their commitment.

Homework is usually set in class. It is very often corrected there also. Frequently, quite a percentage of teaching time can be devoted to setting, clarifying, hassling, hustling, correcting, explaining once more, chastising, threatening, encouraging, coaxing, all in the name of homework. This is probably not very efficient. Again, valuable hours are often spent by teachers in their own time correcting, but with no guarantee that the students will devote their attention to profitably evaluating and appreciating this effort.

Correcting homework can easily become a mechanical chore, with the answers called out and numbed heads ticking right or wrong, with no real idea why and lacking the motivation to find out. In other words, a lot of valuable energy, which could probably be better used in other ways, can disappear into the vortex of homework. So the question is how to balance the three elements of home, work and class so that the whole procedure, concept and final product is useful and fulfilling.

Key requisites

Homework can be rewarding and enriching, and all the arguments put forward in favour of it earlier are valid. Nevertheless, to be effective, it needs to be achievable without the support of a teacher, needs to engage the students and needs to be effectively dealt with back in school, by the teacher.

Dovetailing homework into teaching practice creates, as in woodwork, a very strong framework for further construction. If the students have to provide part of a puzzle or contribute something which will be actively used in class, they will be motivated and even under peer pressure to produce a product that has entailed fruitful work outside the class, whether it is at home or not. Here are some suggestions for making homework fresh and vibrant, rather than a dull chore:

- Correction is central to student involvement, but traditional correction by a teacher at the front of the class is not that useful. Simply having a student read out the answers, or handing out copies of the answer key, frees the teacher up to monitor, help or simply observe how effectively the students have dealt with the task, and to plan remedial work for a future class if necessary. The key is to involve the students actively, and use the information gained from the process effectively. If it was worth spending time doing it at home, it is worth spending class time evaluating the results. When discussing ‘demand-high ELT’, Jim Scrivener and Adrian Underhill explore the area of correction and how it can be used to develop class work around students’ misunderstandings and queries, almost in a Dogme-like fashion. By paying close attention to the errors and needs demonstrated during the process of correction, teachers are accessing a mine of information as to what their students may need and benefit from.

- Routines can be important in ensuring that homework is done, but they can also create complacency. Rather than setting a small amount each class, why not consider setting homework once a month, or at the end of each unit, and then spending a complete class correcting it? Varying routines adds flexibility and aids motivation, and helps avoid the trap of being dull and repetitive.

- Not everybody has to do the same thing. Just as routines can be flexible while retaining their inherent structure, so too can the activities the students are set. Individual students or groups of students could be set different tasks and then compare, exchange information, correct each other’s work, etc in class. Meanwhile, the teacher can monitor, aid, encourage and correct when necessary, and is once more free to evaluate both student progress and needs.

- Modern technology offers lots of alternatives to more traditional written homework activities. Presentations, recordings, images, online postings and collaborative work can all provide interesting tasks which can be usefully exploited in class. All of these options offer a degree of personalisation which will...
Homework or no homework?

make homework more meaningful and motivating for the students. And even if you have no IT resources in your classroom, the students can probably bring in the material on their own mobile devices.

Following on from the previous point is the logical move into a more ‘flipped’ classroom. The traditional teacher presentation of new material in class, which is then revised at home, can be reversed. Students can be set the task of researching and then presenting in class: anything from new vocabulary to grammar or simply topics for classwork on clarifying, explaining and further practice. Students are freed up to monitor and deal with emerging language and potential problems more effectively.

Homework can be immensely motivating and a wonderful way of involving and engaging students, not just in activities outside class but also in the lessons themselves. To be successful, it is a question of emphasis: how important homework is or should be, and how the teacher gets this message across. Moreover, to achieve this goal effectively, the question of procedure also needs to be addressed: Will the homework tasks be effective? Will they encourage and motivate the students to work, and what does the teacher have to do to make it all gel and blend it into a potent resource?

Effective homework is just like an efficient class: the teacher is crucial to getting the combination right. Simple setting and correcting can be lame, compared to the potentially explosive mix of home, work and class in the hands of a skilled teacher.

I think I have convinced myself! My students will be doing more homework from now on, and it might even reduce the time I devote to lesson planning!

COMPETITION RESULTS

Congratulations to all those readers who successfully completed our Prize Crossword 67.

The winners, who will each receive a copy of either the Macmillan Collocations Dictionary or Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus are:

Simon Mumford, Izmir, Turkey
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Emilie Daher, Pressignac, France
Heikki Koski, Turku, Finland
Halime-Merve Esan, Günsburg, Germany
Karen Faulkner, Taunton, UK

Old Russian proverb

Enda Scott is a teacher trainer who has worked in EFL for over 25 years. He has given talks and workshops all over Spain. He has an MEd in Educational Technology from the University of Manchester and is a past president of TESOL-SPAIN. He blogs at eflbytes.wordpress.com.

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Rafael Rodriguez Coroner, Spain 2014

Framework: Academic Writing and Critical Thinking
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and ‘writing frameworks’
Framework focuses on:
Writing skills: organising essays; writing reports; describing graphs, tables and charts; referring to sources and avoiding plagiarism.
Critical thinking skills: looking at both sides of an argument; defining terms; commenting on data; solving problems; and building strong arguments.
Level: a low-intermediate to intermediate course aimed at:
IELTS – 4.5 to 6.0 (CEF – B1 to B2)
Mohammed Arroub separates the sounds from the stream.

This article identifies some of the features of rapid connected speech that cause listening comprehension problems for most learners who are taught in ‘careful speech’ classrooms. It also underscores the relevance of learning to produce connected speech in order to acquire a natural, smooth-flowing speaking style. The article divides aspects of connected speech into those related to receptive skills and those related to productive skills. It concludes with suggestions for how to train students to be able to cope with natural spoken language in real-life situations.

Listening comprehension

Most students who are accustomed to English which is modified to take into account the fact that they are learners, experience difficulties understanding a native speaker. This is mainly because natural speech is fast, but also because of the changes that occur in the stream of casual speech, and it is very demotivating. I will examine here four features of rapid connected speech that I find my students need to become familiar with for better listening comprehension: assimilation, glottal stop, omission of /t/ and intrusive /r/.

The examples given are limited to the changes that make words difficult for my own students to recognise aurally.

1 Assimilation

Students often find it difficult to recognise words, even when these words are familiar to them, because of the process of assimilation that occurs when words are combined in the stream of fast natural speech. As Peter Roach points out, this process affects the ‘edges’ of words: the last sound of one word and the first sound of the following word fuse, to form a new third sound.

Christiane Dalton and Barbara Seidlhofer identify the following changes that occur before a /ʃ/ sound:

- /t/ changes to /ʃ/ (eg start your own business /stɑtʃə/)  
- /d/ changes to /ð/ (eg He’ll send you the file. /sendlə/)  
- /s/ changes to /ʃ/ (eg this university /ðzfju:nɪvəsəti/)  
- /z/ changes to /ʒ/ (eg I didn’t recognise you /rɪkɔnɹaɪzə/)  

Raising my students’ awareness of this type of assimilation can help them distinguish the words they hear in natural speech.

2 Glottal stop

The glottal stop, considered a characteristic of ‘lazy’ speech by many people, is another feature that can make it difficult for students to understand natural spoken language.

Represented by the phonemic symbol /ʔ/, and produced by cutting off the air supply sharply so that there is a gap between one sound and the next, the glottal stop takes the place of /t/ when it follows a vowel, as in getting better /gɛtɪŋ beʔər/. It also replaces a /t/ when the /t/ follows /r/ (eg curtain), when it precedes /n/ or /ŋ/ (eg lightning, treatment) and when it comes after /n/ (eg mental).

3 Omission of /t/

The omission of /t/ in the sequence /nt/ in American English causes the same or even more difficulty for my students. Words which they find particularly difficult to identify include: in(t)egration, advan(t)age, sen(t)ences, con(t)ent, men(t)al, moun(t)ain, cen(t)re, acciden(t)al, iden(t)ical, den(t)ist and win(t)er.

4 Intrusive /r/

The intrusive /r/ is another feature that makes it difficult for my students to pick out individual words when they listen to authentic English speech. Gerald Kelly identifies this as happening when one word ends in a vowel sound and the next word begins with one: an extra /r/ is inserted to make a smooth transition. For example, in Syrian at the moment, I saw it and the idea of.

Sometimes, an intrusive /r/ replaces /t/ at the end of a word before another word beginning with a vowel, making it even more difficult for learners to understand. For example, shut up becomes shur up, put it down becomes put it down.

Oral production

Requiring learners to employ all the features of connected speech in speaking entails self-consciousness and over-carefulness that may hamper fluency. Jennifer Jenkins recommends that intelligibility should be the goal for learners to aim at, rather than ‘perfection’ of accent. Tricia Hedge goes further, and maintains that speaking intelligibly is an indicator of communicative competence.
Therefore, the features of connected speech which I concentrate on getting my learners to produce, with the aim of helping them to sound natural, are limited to some types of linking, along with elision.

1 Linking
Linking mainly takes place when there is a consonant at the end of a word, followed by a vowel at the beginning of the next. For example, in standard British English the /r/ at the end of the words there and four is not usually pronounced. However, it is pronounced in the phrase there are four apples.

Linking also occurs when a word that ends in a vowel is followed by one that begins with a vowel. I encourage my students to make smooth transitions between words by which end and begin with vowel sounds by adding the sounds /j/ and /w/ as in I agree /ai jɔːrj/ and do it now /djuː wt nəʊ/.

2 Elision
Elision is the process whereby one or more phonemes are ‘dropped’, usually in order to make words easier to say. It happens both within individual words and across word boundaries. It may occur for both vowels and consonants, although it is much more common for consonants. Helping students to use elision when they speak English in an informal or conversational context helps to make their oral production sound natural. It is different from reading a text, where words tend to be pronounced slowly and singly.

The initial /h/ sound is often deleted in unstressed pronouns and forms of the auxiliary verb have. For example, tell (h)im, you shouldn’t (h)ave.

The sounds /t/ or /d/ are often dropped when they come between two consonant sounds. For example, next(t) week, mus(t) go.

Sometimes an entire syllable containing the unstressed schwa /a/ is dropped. For example, int(e)r(e)st, diff(e)rent, cam(e)ra.

Teaching connected speech
So how important is it to teach connected speech? According to Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich: 'Extensive work on the aspects of connected speech ... will not only contribute to students’ ability to produce fluent and comprehensible speech, but also to their ability to comprehend the spoken language.’ Jeremy Harmer suggests four possibilities for including the teaching of pronunciation in language classes: whole lessons; discrete slots; integrated phases; and opportunistic teaching, i.e. dealing with any problems or issues as and when they crop up in a lesson.

I raise the issue of connected speech with my own students, who are Arab learners of English, by first letting them listen to some informal natural English and asking them to try to guess what has been said. They are often amazed at how difficult they find it to understand, and how different it is from the speech they are used to hearing on coursebook CDs. (For this reason, I always look out for coursebooks which include ‘real-life’ listening materials.) I follow up this initial awareness-raising with some of the following activities, which help to promote the use of connected speech:

• When introducing new language (collocations, phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, etc.), I always present it in the way it would appear in connected speech, and sometimes highlight those features on the board.

• I often start a lesson by getting the students to practise saying some sentences aloud, concentrating on aspects of connected speech contained in them. This can also be considered a ‘mouth gymnastics’ activity. For example: Yesterday I got up late, so I didn’t brush my teeth but went straight to school.

• Every now and then, I ask my students to highlight aspects of connected speech in a text or ask them to identify how certain chunks of words would sound in casual speech.

• I do ‘listen and repeat’ activities to highlight certain aspects of connected speech that I want my students to be able to produce.

• I do ‘listen and complete’ activities for aspects of connected speech that I want my students to be able to identify when doing listening comprehension. For example, they are given the transcript of a listening text with some of the words missing. The missing words are chosen to reflect the features of connected speech which I want them to learn to recognise.

• One of the ways I get my students to practise deletions of /t/ is through saying superlative sentences, for example: This is the silliest joke I’ve ever heard. I also get them to ask each other superlative questions, for example: What’s the biggest city in the world?

• I ask my students to roleplay excerpts of a dialogue as it might appear in natural English. They can first mark or highlight the aspects of connected speech on a transcript of the dialogue. I also use some dramatic dialogues from plays by Harold Pinter, which give a good representation of natural spoken English.

Teaching students to recognise and produce some of the features of connected speech is a way of dealing with some of their comprehension problems. It is also the first step towards helping them to speak a little more naturally.

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Let’s work together!

Daniela Incze gets her young students collaborating in communicative activities.

As foreign language teachers interested in good teaching, it is important for us to analyse our teaching practice and our students’ progress as part of the process of planning our classroom activities and determining the content of our courses. One of our aims must be that our students should be able to communicate in social situations and on straightforward everyday topics with people from other countries whom they encounter in their own country, and to be able to find their way around and lead a reasonably normal life when they themselves visit an English-speaking country. In other words, the aim of all our teaching is to train our students to achieve communicative efficiency.

In order to fulfil this aim, I believe that we need to have the courage to stop relying upon constant drilling of language in the classroom and, instead, take steps to help our students, from their earliest years, to work together, listening to each other with attention and with interest, appreciating differing points of view, questioning their own values and accepting and respecting other people’s opinions and feelings. We must, therefore, extend our repertoire of communicative activities so that our learners can have a wider range of communicative experiences, in situations similar to those they will encounter outside the classroom.

Speaking

One of the most effective means of encouraging real-life language use with young learners is to use communicative games. These are based on the principle of the information gap – where the students all have different information which they have to share in order to achieve a common goal – and they are generally very stimulating and entertaining. They rely for their effectiveness on the fact that the students are put into a situation in which they need to work together and use any or all of the language they possess in order to complete a game-like speaking task.

To develop their ability to tell stories in their own words, I often use the following activity, which also has a writing element: I choose two different stories, each no longer than 15–20 lines. The students are put into pairs, with each student in a pair receiving a different text. They read the texts silently and then tell each other their stories, in their own words. Next they write the stories they heard from their partners. The students’ written compositions are then compared to the original texts.

‘Interest pie’ is another activity that all my students enjoy. It provides an opportunity for them to review previously-taught language, to express their own likes and dislikes and to talk to each other about themselves and their interests. First, the students are asked to draw a pie chart on a sheet of paper. They then divide their pie into several slices and write on each slice a word related to an activity or a thing that they are very interested in. The width of each slice depends on the importance they give to this activity or thing. They pin the piece of paper on the front of their clothing and, in pairs, they talk to each other and ask questions about the information they can see in their partner’s pie. They have ten minutes to carry out this activity. I go round, listening and taking notes, and when they have finished, I comment on their mistakes, the structures they used and their pronunciation.
Let’s work together!

Writing

Just as students need a context, a situation or a stimulus to encourage them to speak, so in a writing lesson they need to be given a reason to write. Furthermore, as it is important that their work should be corrected and given a grade (in order to see how well they are performing or to identify anything that is going wrong and needs improving), we need to set achievable writing tasks so that they get the satisfaction of writing well, rather than being left free to make demotivating mistakes. I firmly believe that we should not put them in a position where they need to use their imagination in order to succeed, and then penalise them for not being naturally imaginative.

For this reason, it is essential that we work gradually up to the stage where the students can express themselves freely. We need to use bridging activities to help them to progress from copying activities to writing free compositions – it is obviously not possible to go straight from one to the other.

Some of the activities described here are highly controlled or guided, others are quite near to free writing.

1. Putting sentences in order

Before doing work to develop students’ awareness of paragraphing and of the need to organise their sentences into a logical sequence, I often use an easy bridging activity which involves ordering sentences from a dialogue written on separate pieces of card. For example, the students, working in groups, are asked to put the following sentences in the correct order to reconstruct a telephone conversation:

A: Two days? All right. Thank you for phoning, Mrs Brown. Goodbye.
B: And she has to stay in bed for two days.
C: Oh, hello, Mrs Brown. How are you?
D: I’m fine, thanks, but Tina isn’t very well. She’s got a cold.
E: Goodbye.
F: Hello. This is Mrs Brown here. I’m Tina’s mother.

2. Completing a paragraph

The students, working in pairs, are asked to convert a series of sentences into a coherent paragraph by inserting linkers, such as and, so, but, that, as soon as, however, because, etc. For example:

Mayfield wanted to know about the past _______ I was so tired _______ I couldn’t keep my eyes open. I crawled into my bunk _______ had a wonderful sleep _______. I woke up, I remembered _______ we had to … etc.

3. Finishing a story

The students, working in groups, are asked to complete a story to which they have been given either the ending or the beginning. For example:

… but it was all right in the end. One of the people in the hotel had found Cathy on the beach and had taken her to the hotel reception. She was really pleased to see us, although she was hungry and tired. We gave her some cat food and then she fell asleep on the bed. Cathy had come back.

4. Mini-projects

Small groups of students can work on mini-projects. These can take a variety of forms. They can be carried out in the classroom – and it is advisable to start with a project that can be carried out within the school itself – or they can take the students out into the local community. They may be completed in one, two or more lessons.

I asked some of my students to think about a Valentine gift that they consider really special, to draw a picture of their idea, to talk about it and to write about it. Finally, after all the groups had presented their own projects to the class, everybody voted on the most romantic idea. The winning project (the picture and the written report) was pinned to the school noticeboard.

In another project, entitled ‘What is your image?’, the students had to use pictures from magazines, newspapers, advertisements, etc to make a poster representing themselves. The posters had to include pictures of:

★ something they enjoy
★ something they hate
★ something they love eating
★ something they keep spending money on

Another project involved getting older students to collect and present information about their town for English-speaking visitors to the area. I told them that the information could take the form of a wall display or even a brochure similar to a tourist information guide. After they had collected information about different local attractions, they drew a map of their town and marked each place on it. The map was also accompanied by a short description.

This form of cooperative learning provides a good opportunity for students to learn together, sharing ideas, respecting each other’s feelings and developing group and social skills. The student-centred activities described here employ a variety of instructional approaches, including ‘learning by doing’, independent study, communicative learning and discussion. They give the students the satisfaction of seeing a tangible outcome that they have produced. In particular, I find that the confidence and self-discipline acquired from doing collaborative project work often results in a much more positive attitude to learning English.

Daniela Incze has been teaching English for about seven years. She enjoys attending courses and seminars in order to improve her teaching skills, and she believes in helping students to develop a passion for English.

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Research into language learning and motivation has changed direction over the past two decades, shifting from what are now considered overly-simplistic models of motivation, such as ‘integrativeness’ (where students are motivated to learn an L2 because they wish to join a community that speaks this language) and ‘instrumentalism’ (where motivation comes from a desire for financial or some other sort of return). Motivation to learn has now been linked to a second-language identity, which is not conceptualised as static, but dynamic, shifting and open to change. Some research studies have focused on investment in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) settings in English-speaking countries: how students invest in the target language in order to get certain returns, not only financial but also related to status, an idea which Bonny Norton Peirce notes as having been borrowed from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

There is also growing research in the area of ‘future selves’ and language learning, such as that by Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda and by Jill Hadfield. Studies into second language identity have revealed the investment committed to forging an identity in English in the lives of economic migrants and those choosing to settle long-term in English-speaking countries. David Block conducted research into economic migrants living in London, revealing how they invest through study opportunities, seeking out locals to speak to, or using English in work. Each of his case studies reveals different features and patterns in these subjects’ lives.

Yet it is also true that second-language identity formation is alive in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, if I may draw a distinction from the ESOL further-education context (in the UK and the US). In an age of globalisation and internationalisation, the role of English has come into much sharper focus, and such a changed global reality poses new questions about motivation to learn. Dörnyei argues that we are now dealing with ‘global English’, and that its acquisition is related to forging ‘a global identity’. I put the case that international English language examinations, such as those offered by Cambridge English, are a powerful symbol of cultural capital, offering returns replete with imagery and entry to imagined communities. Imagined communities, it has been argued, are envisaged personal networks of the future, whether social, professional or even international. Investment and the motivation to learn can spring from the desire to belong to these imagined communities. How this imagery and investment relates to their own students should be something that teachers become familiar with.

An empirical exploration
I conducted interviews with learners enrolled in Cambridge examination preparation classes in a language school in Sicily in order to explore these themes in an empirical context. This exploratory study examines the role of
English in these learners’ lives today, investment in studying towards international examinations, and entry to imagined communities and imagined future selves. It then discusses implications for classroom practice.

**Data collection**

Data was collected by means of a 20-minute interview. This was undertaken in English and was part of lesson time. The students were told of the purpose of the interview, and pseudonyms are used. A short follow-up interview was also conducted to clarify or explore aspects further.

**Learning histories**

The interviews revealed, unsurprisingly, that the learners were able to articulate their learning and show how they began to develop both some degree of confidence in English and also to form initial second-language identities.

**Angela (PET)**

‘I started learning at elementary school, and I think I was pretty good, and after that I had a very good teacher who wanted us to study hard so I became more interested and started private lessons with a teacher near my house. I went to her when I was 13 and then I came to this school (private language school). I noticed in this period, from when I was 13 on, that when I listened to music I understood words, so I was very satisfied with the progress and it is so good when first you don’t understand the words and then you are able to. You can be open to new things. I felt more part of the world, and more part of the international world. I felt this more recently. Now I can understand even more and can make sense of the songs.’

Here, Angela articulates how following the lyrics of songs was both a motivation to learn more English and also a kind of symbol of her progress and a marker of her ‘place in the world’.

**Ricardo (PET)**

‘I started to be good at English after primary school because the teacher was excellent. She helped us with grammar and pronunciation, and also with speaking, of course, because she always spoke to us in English. Later I started this school and I realise I am very satisfied with my English.

I became able at the beginning of elementary school to speak and understand and then when I realised I could do it, I wanted to travel, to see new cultures and talk to other people. But still I haven’t gone but I hope soon.’

Riccardo recalls how a teacher encouraged his interest in the subject and how his new set of skills provided him with a picture of travelling and exploring new cultures; he could still imagine doing so. In fact, Riccardo was later to take a cruise with the school during which he used English with other young Europeans. He reflected that his English level was better than many of these other young people and that he was glad to be studying towards a B1 examination.

**Davide (IELTS)**

‘When I was about 13, I started using the internet and I had a direct link to the global view and I started to use what I had learnt at school. At first it was strange. I used to email friends and was looking for some products to buy online. After two years I began World of Warcraft and I had to use it to speak with other players. When you speak with English people you enter into a world “extra scholastic” because they use English from their community. When I lived in Cambridge for a few months, I met different English people with different accents and different ways of speech.’

Here, Davide reveals that initially using a second language on the internet was disconcerting and then later how playing a computer game online with international players forged for him an identity as a member of a community, in this case one of international fantasy gamers. During his time working in Cambridge, he again realised the importance of language and community, and in a follow-up interview he described how he became aware of this through working in a restaurant with a variety of people.

**Visions of the future**

The students were able to articulate why they were studying towards achieving certification from Cambridge and what it meant for their future. Riccardo said:

‘When I came to this PET preparation class I tried to exercise the English I knew and then I worked on progress and I can say I am always improving. I hope to join the navy and be an engineer, but if I can’t, I will do engineering at university. Probably at the same time I would like to become a swimming instructor. I can imagine being in Australia doing this and where I can enjoy activities that you do there. In future I can use PET to help me get into the navy. I like doing English because it is a language most expanded in the world. It is a sort of communication means.’

Riccardo imagines a future for himself in which English plays a role: either as a seaman or as a swimming instructor. Both of these future selves would involve having a second-language identity, as living in Australia would require daily use of English both professionally and socially. The PET examination here provides a means of progressing to this future.

Angela, despite being only 15 years old, also has a future vision, bound up with proficiency in English:

‘At the moment I am doing PET in this school. What do I like about my course? Well, now I can talk with other people, can read things without needing translations. I like in class when we talk and I can practise this a lot. This is practice I have never done. For me it is a new style. I would like to go to university to study another language and then find a job, but not in Italy, so this course will definitely help me. I can imagine going to the UK. I need to have a certificate to find a good job in these times. If I don’t go to university, then I will need a certificate, and if do go to university, I will need it too. Next year, I definitely want to do the FCE and keep studying.’

Here, Angela visualises the PET only as a stepping stone to greater things, such as the FCE and university study. The examinations provide the capital (to borrow from Bourdieu) – social (in terms of status) and financial (in terms of employment) – that Angela feels are necessary to live the life she imagines.
A question of identity

They are also a source of pride in her relationship with her family.

Davide says about his plans:
‘My future plan is to go to take a degree in contemporary music in London. I applied last year, but I was asked to improve my music theory and also get 6 in IELTS. I took the exam and got 5.5. Now I need a 6 and I would do it now even if I wasn’t trying to go to study in London. I would keep studying it to improve my English, but you need to know how to communicate in speaking and writing too, not just ‘Oh, I have an IELTS 6’. With language you have more power. English plays a priority role for me. I think all is connected to English. It is a priority for everyone; at university you have to do it, for example. Italy is in terrible crisis and so I need to improve; I think this leads to a happy and stable future.’

Davide is able to articulate his second-language identity: that through language one has ‘power’. He also reveals his attitudes to having a command of English and to the IELTS examination by showing how the exam is not only a means of getting on a university course but also a means of becoming a communicator in English. He is thus aware that being simply ‘instrumental’ in his studies is not sufficient for what he wishes to achieve: to form a second-language identity, as a music student in England. In addition, the drive to achieve entry to this future community is linked to the current financial crisis.

Implications for classroom practice

A great series of articles on the L2 motivational self (‘A second self”) by Jill Hadfield in previous issues of ETp set out the implications for classroom practice of this theory. In Part 4 of the series, she discusses the classroom learning experience, highlighting the key areas of teacher presence and rapport, subject matter and teaching approach, class climate and, finally, self-worth and the experience of success. Following Jill, I agree that we can begin to understand our learners by conducting a good needs analysis at the beginning of an examination preparation class. There is much information to be gleaned by asking students about their past learning experiences, their future goals and their interests beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, the learners could be asked to write what they would like to achieve in the limits of the course, how they will get there and how they envisage a future when they have passed the exam. This can be reviewed halfway through the course and also at the end, in order to keep the vision and the investment alive.

I also agree that we can include tasks which are not directly related to preparation for the examination. For instance, I have included giving presentations and undertaking mini-projects in groups, involving collecting data and writing reports. Jill Hadfield suggests using guest speakers and organising trips, for example. Furthermore, after learning about students and their interests, why not source some materials, either written or spoken, that they would appreciate, either to be used as the basis of classroom tasks or work outside the class?

We, as teachers, and the organisations in which we teach can be potent symbols of identity. Having some belief in our learners, giving them encouragement to strive towards their goals and making our learning environments less hierarchical – something many of our classrooms, in fact, are – can pave the way for a truly humanistic education.

Block, D Second Language Identities Bloomsbury 2009
Hadfield, J ‘A second self 4’ English Teaching Professional 81 2012
Norton Peirce, B ‘Social identity, investment, and language learning’ TESOL Quarterly 29 (1) 1995

Ryan Simpson has been an English as a second language teacher for over 15 years. He has an MSc in TESOL and, in addition to having taught in several other countries, was an ESOL lecturer in the UK for many years. He is a member of the IATEFL ESOL Special Interest Group, and is currently teaching in a language school in Sicily.

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Writing by numbers

Sasan Baleghizadeh and Maryam Shakouri suggest an activity for teaching cohesion and coherence.

Writing well involves a variety of skills which students need to learn if they are to create well-organised and meaningful pieces of writing. An understanding of coherence and cohesion is particularly important, as these factors play such an important role in the writing process. Unfortunately, many students are either unfamiliar with these concepts or unable to apply them to writing in a foreign language.

The activity described in this article aims to familiarise the students with the concepts of coherence and cohesion. It is suitable for students at upper-intermediate and advanced levels, and it also takes into account the need to expand the students’ vocabularies and provide them with a real context for writing.

**Aims**
The activity we describe here has two main purposes:

1. to familiarise the students with the concepts of coherence and cohesion and train them in the logical ordering of information and the use of cohesive devices, specifically conjunctions, in their own writing;

2. to improve the students’ retention of newly-learnt vocabulary items by giving them a context in which these can be used in their own work.

It also has some crucial subsidiary aims:

- to give the students experience of creative writing in order to encourage them to see writing as a fun activity, to help them improve their writing ability, foster their imaginations and give them inspiration so that they don’t waste time thinking about how to start writing and what to write;

- to encourage the students to engage in critical thinking by promoting discussion and negotiation of meaning in the preparatory stages of a writing activity;

- to motivate the students by providing variety and challenge;

- to promote collaborative learning by means of group activities in which the students share responsibilities, learn from each other and work together in a friendly and cooperative atmosphere.

This activity is not limited to any particular genre of writing: the students could write anything, from a story, to a poem, to a piece of conversation. The main point is that they will be practising coherence and cohesion and learning how to write, based on a specific context. Once they understand the notion of context, the students should be able to match the genre they are writing in with the appropriate vocabulary.

**Procedure**
The activity should take between 50 and 70 minutes to complete.

- First, review the meaning of the words you intend to use in the activity. Also, introduce and explain the different types of conjunctions in English: coordinating conjunctions which join grammatically independent clauses, and subordinating conjunctions which join subordinate clauses to main clauses. It is a good idea to write examples from each category on the board in different colours. To save time, the explanation of the different types of conjunctions and the teaching of new vocabulary can be done in a previous session, but they should be reviewed before the activity to activate the students’ memories.

- Divide the students into groups, preferably including students with differing levels of proficiency in each group.

- Ask each group to choose a group name and write their choices on the board.

- Invite each group to choose a two-digit number, a three-digit number and a four-digit number, using the numbers from one to nine, making sure that each number is used at least once. This will ensure that the students use all the target words.
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<td>scrap</td>
<td>legitimate</td>
<td>enhance</td>
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- Draw a table with nine vertical columns and two horizontal rows on the board. Write the numbers from one to nine in the first row and your target words in the second row (see above). Make sure you don’t draw the table until after the students have finished selecting their numbers, to ensure that all their selections are based on chance. This adds to the challenge of the activity and ensures that a greater variety of words is used. If you have more than nine target words, you can draw more than one table; if there are fewer than nine target words, words learnt in previous lessons can be used to complete the table.

- Ask each group to find the words in the table that correspond to the numbers they chose. They have to make sentences using these words. For example, if one group has selected 29, 637 and 1485, they first have to make one or more meaningful sentences with *languish* and *enhance*, then with *eminent*, *composedly* and *scrap*, and lastly with *performance*, *progenitor*, *legitimate* and *latitude*. There is no limit to the number of sentences they write and these can be in any genre of writing: a short story, lines from a conversation, a joke, a poem, etc.

- The main aim is to give the students practice in making meaningful and rational connections between different concepts in a specific context, so these principles should be clarified before they begin writing. Encourage the students to use different types of conjunctions, and explain that one point will be awarded for using conjunctions accurately and another point will be awarded for creating meaningful sentences. At the end of the activity, the group with the most points will be the winner.

- Before they begin, each group should discuss the task, decide what to write about and then write it down. Give guidance where necessary.

- When all the groups have finished writing, get each group to read their sentences aloud, and invite the whole class to discuss their meaningfulness and the use of conjunctions. After this evaluation, allocate points to each group whose sentences were meaningful (one point for each piece of writing in which one of the groups of words was used), and put a coloured star sign next to the group’s name on the board. Do the same for the accurate use of conjunctions. You might like to dispel the myth of ‘the more the better’ in the use of conjunctions by allotting points only to appropriate and accurate usage. If you notice that specific types of conjunctions have not been used well, take the opportunity to do some remedial teaching at this stage.

- Involve the whole class in a discussion about the pieces of writing, the use of the target vocabulary and the various conjunctions. Also encourage a personal response to the activity by asking questions such as: Which group’s sentences did you find most interesting? Why? Which conjunctions would you like to have used but you didn’t know how? What conjunctions could be used instead of ‘the ones your classmates used in their writing?’

- Briefly review the students’ ideas (especially those connected to the aims of the activity) after the discussion.

This activity can be used to promote the use of other cohesive devices apart from conjunctions. You might want to use it to practise reference, ellipsis, substitution and lexical cohesion, which students will also need to learn in order to produce successful written texts.

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**IT WORKS IN PRACTICE**

Maryam Shakouri has an MA in TEFL from Shahid Beheshti University (GC) in Tehran, Iran, where she teaches courses in applied linguistics, syllabus design and materials development. Her research interest lies in exploring the role of interaction in English language teaching and materials development issues.

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helena.gomm@pavpub.com
I have been teaching for 30 years, and this year have decided to approach each class as though I were a new teacher – reading the Teacher’s Book and also trying to think of novel and effective ways to stimulate my students. Ideally, a course of teacher development or teacher training for old timers would have been ideal, but nothing like that exists here in Rome, where I teach university students who are studying foreign languages, so I have decided to make the best use of my ETP subscription and to use the magazine as my ‘teacher trainer’.

My class of students are at the lower end of the C1 level, as defined by the Council of Europe Framework of Reference for Languages. In their final exam, each student reads a different text about a related topic, summarises the text and then talks to a partner about it. They then discuss the issues which come up. It would be nice to be able to say that my students are motivated by a love of the language, but the truth is that, for most of them, motivation is entirely extrinsic – they want to pass the exam.

Many coursebooks have two ‘A’ and ‘B’ articles which students need to read and then talk about with their partners. The text I decided to use for one of my lessons comes from a very well-known coursebook and is about ‘multi-tasking’. The book divides the students into A and B pairs, and each student is asked to read and answer questions at home on their text and to come to class prepared to talk to their partner about it.

**Doing something different**

Having trawled through ETP for ideas, I came across Rachael Roberts’s ‘Do something different with your coursebook 3’ in Issue 90, which was on different approaches to reading comprehension.

I decided to adopt Roberts’s idea of collaborative reading: a very simple idea, which would help the students practise all four skills and, in so doing, practise the different components of the exam.

Instead of putting each Student A with a Student B and getting them to tell their partner about their texts, I put the students in pairs of As and pairs of Bs. I then asked them to think of a title for each paragraph of their text and to discuss their choices. As the class was relatively small (16 students), I was able to monitor the activity, understand how they approached a text, listen to their discussions and feed in ideas. Twenty minutes later, I put the students into new pairs – this time the As with the Bs – and asked them to tell their partner about their text, using their headings to help them.

At the end of the exercise I asked the students what difference the preliminary activity had on their ability to summarise their articles orally – the answers included ‘it made it a lot easier’ and ‘it was very useful’.

This comprehension lesson led nicely into a follow-up lesson on composition writing. I reminded the students that each paragraph should have a controlling idea (reflected in the titles they had given to the paragraphs in the ‘multi-tasking’ reading) and of the importance of writing a topic sentence in their own paragraphs and compositions. Thanks to Rachael Robert’s initial idea on collaborative reading, we managed to kill several birds with one stone.

So I will be going back to ETP to find a lot more techniques that will give new life to this old timer!

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English for startups

The startup scene in Berlin is booming. According to a McKinsey report published in 2013, German and international venture capitalists in Berlin invested more than 133 million euros in the startup sector in 2012. Furthermore, as the scene has developed from small teams of passionate enthusiasts to men in suits pitching to blue-chip investors, a whole sub-culture has emerged. Bright yellow crates of Club-Mate, the startup scene’s highly caffeinated tipple of choice, fill the corridors of these companies, where bright young things tap away in silver rows of Apple Macs. Moreover, Soundcloud and Mozilla are just two of several well-known companies that have put down roots in this eco-system that allows new businesses to flourish.

But what differentiates these startups from more traditional firms, and how should English teachers approach working in this new environment?

Decentralised learners

According to Neil Blumenthal, co-founder of Warby Parker, ‘A startup is a company working to solve a problem where the solution is not obvious and success is not guaranteed’. Completely by chance, I myself started teaching at a medium-sized startup and was surprised by this new and unusual habitat. For example, I began by using a standard business English coursebook with my class of software developers, project managers and interns. But I soon became aware of a tsunami of boredom that swept across the class whenever we did coursebook exercises. This forced me to look at my own teaching practice and the working context of the learners themselves.

So, after getting to know the learners, finding out more about the company’s business activities and observing what happened in the firm on a day-to-day basis, I arrived at five key characteristics which I think English teachers should bear in mind when working with startups. I call them FIDEL:

F = Flat hierarchy. The genesis of a startup is usually a group of people who share a multitude of roles, working furiously to establish a profitable brand. As startups become bigger, they often still operate within a flat hierarchy where the staff work in project teams rather than in a traditional hierarchy.

I = Iterative working. Startups, especially in the IT sector, work iteratively. Projects develop slowly and in cycles, with regular testing and gradual improvements.

D = Decentralised working. Staff work in decentralised teams, perhaps only dealing with one specific business activity, for example search engine optimisation (SEO).

E = Electronic communication, especially in virtual teams. Because startups often operate on a national, international and/or global basis, electronic communication via email and Skype occupies a much more prominent position.

L = Learning. Learning needs to be directly applicable to everyday business practice. In the startup companies where I have worked, English is the predominant working language. This means that the learners have a direct need for vocabulary that they can pick up and use in real-life working situations right now. This is in contrast to other teaching situations where English is not needed for everyday communication.

These characteristics gave me a head start, in that my learners’ expectations, though influenced by years of traditional schooling, were also coloured by more decentralised and iterative ways of working in IT startups. Lucky me!

Decentralised teaching

I found that this set of characteristics opened up new opportunities for classroom practice. The experience of working at a startup was the perfect incubator for an approach I’ve called ‘decentralised teaching’. Some concepts that lie at the heart of this approach to business English teaching are:

Devolving power to the learners

Encouraging learners to take a more active role in their own learning is a cornerstone of the learner autonomy movement. But I think there are problems with defining learner autonomy and establishing what exactly an autonomous learner is. I would rather focus on devolving power from...
the teacher to the learner, so the learners take a more active role in their language learning. Therefore, my learners can decide on the content of the classes, they can set their own personal learning goals, and they can even help shape the methodology.

**Process rather than results**
The process of decentralised teaching, where the learners co-create the lessons with the teacher, does not provide quick results. But it frees both parties from the shackles of a traditional coursebook syllabus and clears a space where something more useful and engaging can emerge.

**Genre specificity**
It might seem obvious that business English teaching should be directly relevant to the learners’ everyday working lives and the tasks they have to perform. But it often isn’t. This is changing with the recent explosion of coursebooks for a variety of special purposes (ESP), but there’s probably not going to be one book that will solve all your training problems.

Teachers should surely be taught how to meet the diverse needs of business English learners without having to wait for the silver bullet of, for example, *Teaching English to Dice Inspectors*. In my classes, we focus heavily on everyday work situations and I provide vocabulary and phrases to help the learners negotiate these situations better. Is there anything new about this approach? Perhaps not. But the advantage of my approach is that it provides a practical roadmap for change. Teachers may study teaching methodologies and SLA theories on training courses, but there’s very little discussion of how to translate methodological or classroom insight into action.

**Decentralised classes**
So how did I actually do decentralised teaching? Simple. I got my learners to brainstorm topics, tasks and other forms of content that they would like to cover in class, and with this we created a 12-week syllabus. Then I prepared teaching materials and activities to support the syllabus. At the end of the 12 weeks, we evaluated the syllabus and made a new one. We’re now at the start of syllabus five.

At this point, I should really credit David Nunan for his idea of a negotiated or process syllabus. But one of the criticisms of negotiated syllabuses is that bringing this kind of democratic decision-making into the classroom often clashes with learner expectations, especially in more traditional educational cultures. For this reason, I think it’s essential that there’s a period of ‘priming’, where the teacher prepares the learners for the ‘shock’ of negotiating a syllabus. And it can be a shock! With this class, there was a seven-month priming period where I gradually introduced more learner-centred activities, including discussions, vocabulary games and task-based activities.

*It might seem obvious that business English teaching should be directly relevant to the learners’ working lives and the tasks they have to perform*

**The results**
I think that the results were overwhelmingly positive, for myself and for the learners. For one of the few times in my ELT career, this 12-week experiment in decentralised teaching with just one class has set off cycles of learning and experimentation which have changed my whole approach to teaching and learning. From feeling that I’d got stuck in a teaching rut, I’ve skilfully turned and cheerfully gone along the way!

But what about the learners? From the responses gathered at the end of the 12 weeks, it is clear that the learners were overwhelmingly positive about this new approach. Comments I received include:

‘Nice ideas, no standard course with boring topics. Instead, huge interactivity and some interesting experiments for a change.’

‘Don’t like using coursebooks. Was nice when you brought articles and explained the grammar yourself.’

But not all the learners were totally positive. When commenting on possible improvements we could make to the course, one of them wrote ‘If the others agree, having some grammar homework from the book’. Well, you certainly can’t win them all! But there is a kernel of truth here. I spent so long designing activities for class, I had neither the time nor the energy to think about designing homework as well. Naturally, published materials have an advantage here as all these problems are pre-solved. But I maintain that with some thought and creativity, a decentralised syllabus can provide effective and varied learning opportunities for business English (and maybe other) learners.

In this article I have tried to lay out my approach of decentralised teaching, which I developed while working with a group of learners at a Berlin startup. Over the course of this experiment, I think my learners have become more engaged with the language, more focused on what they want to achieve and, dare I say it, more autonomous!

Personally, I feel I’ve repainted my pedagogical landscape and now feel more confident in trying out new ideas, activities and techniques.

What I would like to see now is more teachers engaging, manipulating and remixing my ideas in different contexts.

**FOR FURTHER DETAILS OF MY 12-WEEK EXPERIMENT INTO DECENTRALISED TEACHING, SEE MY BLOG AT WWW.DECENTRALISEDTEACHINGANDLEARNING.COM.**

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"IELTS develops the skills required for study or work"
Here is a good deal of disquiet about some aspects of the digital revolution and the impact it might be having on our lives. Much of this has focused on issues of privacy and identity theft, and on the problem of online grooming and paedophile activities. These are undoubtedly matters that should concern us. However, the book I am reviewing here explores some issues which could be even more important for the future of humankind. Its main focus is the potential changes digital devices might be creating in the physical structure of our brains.

**Mind Change**

The book’s title, *Mind Change*, is intended to echo the resonances of *Climate Change*, as a phenomenon which could have equally devastating consequences for our species. Susan Greenfield’s thesis is based on a simple syllogism: the human brain is plastic and adapts quickly to changes in the environment; the environment is changing in an unprecedented way and at an unparalleled rate; the human brain is, therefore, likely to be changing too. She begins by showing that the current phenomena of cyber-activity are also unprecedented, both in the quantity of exposure and the range of applications now available. One result of this is that young people have become more sedentary and are no longer exposed to ‘real-world’ activities. (Sue Palmer’s book *Toxic Childhood* develops this theme at length.)

In Chapter 3, *A Controversial Issue*, Greenfield concedes that there are arguments on both sides, and that there may be benefits from these technologies, provided they are used in moderation. Yet she also presents evidence to show that today’s youth may be ‘an easily distracted generation with short attention spans’. (In Issue 85, I mentioned Nicholas Carr’s book, *The Shallows*, which develops these ideas.)

Chapter 4, *A Multifaceted Phenomenon*, sets out the three areas the author will develop in the rest of the book: ‘social networking and the implications for identity and relationships; video-gaming and the implications for attention, addiction and aggression; search engines and the implications for learning and memory.’

The next four chapters deal with the brain, and how the brain becomes the mind. Greenfield shows how behaviour can change the brain. It is ‘sculpted by a lifetime of experiences’: the more we repeat experiences, the more they become integrated into the physical structure of the brain. (As the psychologist Donald Hebb observed, ‘neurons that fire together, wire together.’) So, ‘the impact of repeated experiences on brain functioning are the bedrock of mind change’. Mind, identity and consciousness are constituted by a unique network of experiences over a lifetime and the connectivity between them. But in Chapter 8, *Out of Your Mind*, Greenfield reflects on what happens ‘in situations where the here-and-now sensation turns us into passive recipients rather than proactive thinkers’, situations when we literally ‘let ourselves go’. The release of dopamine in the brain is common to addictive behaviour such as alcohol and drug consumption and gambling – and also, it appears, to excessive involvement in the intense visual and auditory stimulation which characterises much cyber-activity.

In the following four chapters, the author focuses on aspects of social networking and its impact on identity, relationships and society. She examines the complex relationships between feeling lonely and social networking, and the appeal of self-disclosure offered by social networking sites. However, she points out that the trade-off for more attention is loss of privacy, and she regards social networking sites as ‘a kind of junk food for the brain, harmless enough in moderation’.
Carr, N The Shallows Atlantic Books 2010
Palmer, S Toxic Childhood Orion 2007

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In the last chapter, Greenfield advises that we should not simply sleepwalk into this dystopic future. She suggests that the media have a role to play in foregrounding these issues, and that more reliable surveys of public opinion and behaviour and more lab-based research are needed. Like climate change, mind change can be diverted if we do something about it now …

Clearly, for all her attempts at objectivity, Susan Greenfield firmly believes that there is a real and present danger to humanity as we know it. The book is written persuasively in an accessible style and, as a leading neuro-scientist, her views deserve careful attention, though she has come in for a lot of critical comment.

If she is right, what are the implications for our teaching?

In regard to relationships, Greenfield contrasts the reality of face-to-face communication with the illusory quality of many online exchanges. Online, what you see is what you get, and there is no call to understand what is happening in other people’s heads or act on it, as would be the case in face-to-face relationships. The result is we are offered the ‘illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship’. She also quotes studies which show that an increase in online relationships is correlated with a decrease in empathy.

Chapter 12, Social Networking and Society, focuses on the way the internet seems to deactivate internal moral controls which would otherwise restrain behaviour. It reviews some of the less desirable effects, such as cyber-bullying and trolling.

The focus turns to video-gaming in the next four chapters, with the observation that video games have contrived to separate the fun from the survival and educational value of traditional games. Video games are designed to be addictive: to stop playing brings on unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. Surveys show that about ten percent of gamers between eight and 18 years old are addicted. Games are not only highly exciting and immersive; they also allow gamers to shut out unpleasant realities about their real identity. Reviewing the effects of video-gaming on attention, Greenfield observes that there may be enhancement of visuo-spatial skills, speed of reaction, etc, thus improving selective attention in the moment, but gamers have increasing difficulties with sustained attention over time. The effect of games in increasing aggressive reactions and reckless behaviour is also examined. The fact that many games are violent, and that in a game there are no real consequences, tends to produce a low-grade disposition to violence. And because the sensory present trumps long-term consequences, this tends to promote a reckless obsession with the here-and-now.

The final chapters review the effects of the easy, free-of-charge, casual and rapid acquisition of unlimited information through the use of search engines such as Google. This could have a damaging effect on memory and on the ability to relate facts to each other in a coherent way. Greenfield writes: ‘The internet presents an endless stream of facts, but deep and interesting questions remain less obvious.’ She cites a 2011 CIBER Research study: ‘… the tendency to rush, rely on point-and-click, first-up-on-Google answers, along with a growing unwillingness to wrestle with nuances or uncertainties or inability to evaluate information, keeps the young especially stuck on the surface of the “information” age, too often sacrificing depth for breadth.’ Studies on multi-tasking and its negative effects on attention spans are reviewed, and evidence is presented that shows that multi-tasking makes learning slower, and is more likely to increase mistakes. There is also a discussion of the effect of digital devices on reading ability and study skills in general, with the conclusion that there is still a balance in favour of face-to-face interaction and physical books. Greenfield goes on to argue that ‘collecting facts is gathering dots, knowledge is joining them up’. To achieve what she regards as the essential goals of a strong sense of individual identity, of individual fulfilment and of being useful to society, she recommends creative thinking, which is ‘not something that can be purchased, downloaded or guaranteed but … can be fostered with the right environment’. She then goes on to discuss the possible effects of wearable digital devices like Google Glass or even of implants. She predicts that ‘… you will no longer be driving what you look at: the display will be driving you’, and that you will then be trapped in an endless hyper-connected present.
For decades, teachers have been advising their students to visualise images of new vocabulary items being learnt in class and to create personal associations in their minds in order to help them remember new words. What they may not realise is that they have been encouraging their learners to take part in a mental process that occurs automatically and unconsciously on a daily basis each time we meet certain chunks of language.

Interesting new research reveals our innate tendency to use visualisation as a language support, and findings also show that besides using the areas of our brains traditionally associated with language, we also use other parts in some types of language processing.

Locating language
For many years, the left-hand side of the brain has been associated with language processing, and the areas labelled Broca and Wernicke have been linked with expressive language, word analysis and comprehension. More recent research has indicated that word form, word information and fluent reading are associated with the occipital lobes located at the back of the brain.

However, new research, combined with years of studies by cognitive scientist Benjamin Bergen, supports findings from the fields of artificial intelligence, neuroscience and cognitive psychology that point to other structures of the brain, known to be ‘lower cognitive’ areas, also being involved in language processing. These structures are not necessarily located in the left hemisphere of the brain.

Processing language
Professor Bergen has pointed out that the traditional ‘language centres’ of the brain – the Broca and Wernicke areas – do tend to be activated when people use language. However, he asserts that the content or subject matter plays a significant role in determining which other parts of the brain become activated, too. For instance, when language describes actions, such as walking, jumping, eating or running, the evolutionary older areas of the brain that control perception and action become activated during the process of understanding.

So it seems that in order to comprehend language, the parts of our brains that deal with any senses and movements that may be included in the content of that language are activated and simulate the performance of those actions. These are sections of our brain that have not evolved primarily for processing language; they are first and foremost responsible for controlling actions and sensory perception.

Therefore, to a certain extent when we are exposed to language, our brains activate visual memories of past experiences. So, for example, when we hear the word jump, visual images of what it is like to jump or see someone else jumping are triggered. The same process occurs when we try to
understand metaphorical language, such as jump on the bandwagon: the lexical chunks create mental pictures and heighten our understanding of the subject matter being described.

Bergen explains that it has been argued over centuries that mental simulation is taking place when we use language. However, it is only recently – due to technological advances in brain imaging – that it has been possible to check whether this image building is, in fact, happening and at what point it happens.

**Image simulation**
Study, education, remediation and intervention have for many years relied on the commonly-accepted belief that language processing principally takes place on the left-hand side of the brain. However, when language was first set down in writing, a message was frequently depicted through drawn images (such as Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese characters) representing whole chunks of meaning, not by means of arbitrary signs such as alphabetic letters. Taking the idea that the brain simulates events, how does it deal with these arbitrary grouped symbols we call words? Does the brain translate them simultaneously into images as we meet them, so we can make sense of our environment or understand the message we are hearing or seeing?

Bergen explains that we know that, cognitively, reading produces similar effects to hearing language – people construct mental simulations of what the ideas described would look, feel or sound like. He also points out that because reading requires visual resources, it appears to be easier to access auditory information stored in the brain – for example, sounds, music and dialogue – while reading, and to access visually-stored information while listening to language.

**Implications for teachers**
So, what are the implications for second language teaching? Professor Bergen says that investigation has begun into whether using movements while learning a second language will help with language acquisition. The suggestion is that if students pretend to use a pair of scissors while repeating the word scissors, they will learn the vocabulary item more powerfully and the word – and idea of the word – will become systematic.

What other methods might be used to help language acquisition, using mental simulation? How can we activate our students’ brains in order to help them create associative memories, encourage them to visualise words in contexts and make visual associations? Here are a few ideas:

- Teachers can try to relate concepts to the students’ background knowledge, or use stories with strong themes and plots so that they can immediately make an association that is personal to them. A simple example might be teaching the word ice cream. The students could be asked about their favourite flavour and the place they prefer to buy ice cream; they could be encouraged to relate their best memory of eating ice cream.

- If relating words and concepts to backgrounds proves difficult, teachers can provide visual representations by way of illustrations, using strong colours or photos or video clips, and use visual aids and accessories to enhance the learning experience for particular points.

- Teachers can encourage students to create their own visual images for concepts, people and entire ideas – again, a simple idea that can be enhanced: do not just teach the words blue and sky or any flying objects, visualise a bird, plane, helicopter, kite or balloon flying in a cloudless blue sky instead.

- Another idea would be to provide the students with direct experiences and hands-on learning with a topic. Teachers can encourage their students to practise applying their newly-acquired language to ‘real life’ situations. For example, through role-playing and acting ‘going shopping’, ‘visiting a restaurant’, ‘buying tickets at the cinema’, ‘asking for information at the train station’, etc.

- Teachers can provide reading texts that deliberately create mental images of the meanings of the words their students are reading. Here is an exercise (adapted from an idea by Mark Fletcher) that can be used for younger learners and which could also be adapted for use with older learners. The teacher reads out the following passage, which uses a number of key words that the students should be familiar with and to which new vocabulary items can be added, and asks the students to visualise what they hear:

  ‘There is a field full of yellow flowers. There is an apple tree in the field. Sitting in the apple tree is a small black and white cat. (What noise does the cat make?) There is a young boy sitting under the tree eating a big red apple. He loves apples. He is reading his book. He finishes eating his apple, stands up and walks to a small stream. He sits down on the grass and watches the fish swimming in the cold water.’

Teachers can try inserting up to seven new words into passages such as this, and afterwards can check how many of the target words for revision and the new words the students remember. They can also ask their students to add extra personal details to any of the stories.

Teachers can benefit from being aware of the new theories being developed as to how our minds process language and naturally ‘fill in the gaps’ to create meaning. With this awareness, they can build upon teaching methods which use visualisation in order to tap into this naturally-occurring process.

It is important to remember that a topic and its content determine the area of the brain used in language processing and production, and also that the older sensory and motoric parts of the brain are areas just waiting to be set in motion in order to play their part in the process of language learning.

**Fletcher, M Teaching for Success English Experience 2002**

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Lexical lions

This is a variant of the classic ‘Sleeping lions’ game which can be used as a warmer or filler to revise vocabulary from topics you have studied so far on the course, as well as working on young learners’ listening skills. It’s fun and requires zero preparation or paperwork!

1 Explain that the whole class will be lions, and that you will be the lion tamer. Use images to support the concept of lion tamer if necessary.

2 Tell the students that the lion tamer can keep all the lions asleep as long as she or he can keep saying words that ‘go together’ (eg strawberry, banana, apple, kiwi). However, if the lion tamer says a word that doesn’t match (eg monkey), all the lions must wake up and ROAR. Try to give a great roar when you say this!

3 Tell the learners to ‘go to sleep’ on their desks, and start with a basic lexical set. Use a soft, musical voice. Be quite quiet: the children will love to listen carefully for when they can ROAR at you.

4 Once they fully understand the game, nominate a stronger student to take the role of lion tamer, and assign them a lexical set to use, eg sports, school subjects, etc. After they’ve had a few rounds, make them choose the next lion tamer.

5 To add a competitive element, you can count how many words different tamers can say before they run out of ideas and have to wake the lions.

Laura McWilliams

Synonym dictation

This form of dictation is a great way to find out about your students’ existing vocabulary and spelling, to practise intensive listening skills, and to introduce new lexis in context.

1 Tell your students that you are going to dictate a short text. Read the text slowly enough so that they are able to note down every word.

2 Once all the students have the whole text recorded, tell them that they are going to hear the text again, this time read more quickly, and with some alterations. On the second hearing, they must listen and underline the words that have been changed.

3 Read out the text again at a more natural speed. On this second reading, instead of dictating the exact words the students have written, replace one word in each line by a synonym.

4 Ask the students to work in pairs and to try to remember the words that were read out on the second hearing. Points can be awarded to make this activity competitive, although usually the challenge of recalling the new words is enough to keep the students engaged.

5 For feedback, elicit the list of underlined words (in order) and put them on the board. Check with the students what kind of word they were replaced by (their synonyms). Then elicit the students’ answers and put them in a second list opposite. How many of the new words did they hear correctly? How many of the synonyms are words they had never heard before?

Extension:

For a fun extension to practise the new lexis, the students can attempt to re-tell the text to their partner from memory, using one of the two lists from the board.

Rose Aylett
Instant debates

This is a very flexible activity. It can last for only five minutes or go on for as long as a whole half hour. It can be used for low levels and all the way up to advanced. The topics can vary greatly, depending on the context. It’s also absolutely material-free!

- Draw two arrows on the board pointing to opposite sides of the classroom. Label one For and the other Against.
- Get the students to stand up. Write a controversial sentence on the board, such as Smoking should be banned in public places or Everyone should have the right to terminate their own life.
- Ask the students to decide if they are ‘for’ or ‘against’ the motion and to move to the corresponding side of the classroom.
- They then discuss why they are for or against the motion for two to three minutes.
- Ask the students to move into the middle of the class, pair up with a member of the opposing group and discuss why they disagree.
- Then repeat the activity with a new sentence, making sure the students speak to new partners each time.

Omar Hammam

Writing by numbers

Ask the students to write the numbers 1 to 10 in their notebooks. Read out the following (with lower-level learners, it is useful to do the task with a strong student demonstrating on the board):

1. Name an object, animal or person that you want to write about.
2. Write two adjectives to describe your object, animal or person.
3. Say where your object, animal or person is.
4. Repeat the word you wrote in Step 1.
5. Say what your object, animal or person is doing.
6. How are they doing it? Write three adverbs of manner.
7. Repeat what you wrote in Step 3.
8. Repeat what you wrote in Step 2.
9. Write two new adjectives to describe your object, animal or person.
10. Repeat the word you wrote in Step 1.

Tell the students to use what they have written to write a short poem. Ask them to read it out to a partner or to the class.

Nadya Mezeli

Alphabet story race

Here’s a fun, visually stimulating way to focus on lexis in a young learner classroom.

Using alphabet cards, or writing the alphabet on the board, elicit from the students examples of words that start with each letter. Then put the students into teams and assign each one a group of letters. They could also pick up random alphabet cards. Give each team a camera and ask them to go around the school trying to take photos of items that start with the letters they have got. For some not very frequent letters, such as X, Y and Z, the students can form the shape of the letter with their bodies, and take a photo of themselves. They can also take pictures of words on signs that start with one of the letters if they can’t find a suitable item. When they finish, the students return to class and in their teams make up a story using the words and photos they have so that it looks like a comic book.

Variations:
If the students are interested in using technology further – and they can access the tools – they could record a video of their story, using the photos they have taken, or even videoing the items while telling the story.

For classes with fewer resources, the students can draw the items rather than take photos.

Ayat Al Tawel

Just ask me!

Here’s a personalised first-day activity, best suited to small classes.

1. Model the activity for the students by drawing on mini-whiteboards or flashcards three or four figures, shapes or pictures that represent something about yourself. For example, if you play the guitar, have a law degree and your name is Nick, you might draw a guitar, a scale symbolising justice, and the letters C I K N.
2. Tell the students ‘This is me’ and ask ‘Can you guess a few things about me?’ Emphasise that you can only answer yes or no. Elicit a range of questions based on the information you have drawn.
3. Hand out mini-whiteboards or blank flashcards and give markers to the students and ask them to draw things about themselves.
4. Ask each student in turn to come to the front of the class and display their drawings. The other students ask yes/no questions to guess what they represent.
5. When they have successfully guessed what each drawing represents, encourage the students to ask follow-up questions to elicit more information.

Monzer Abdel-Gawad
Creativity and Writing Pedagogy
by Harriet Levin Millan and Martha C Pennington (Eds)
Equinox 2014
978-1-78179-116-5

In attempting to bridge the gap between creative and academic writing, this book offers a challenging and unique view of writing pedagogy. The editors, Harriet Levin Millan and Martha C Pennington, are a poet and a scholar respectively. Both are involved in teaching writing at university level. The two chapters which they have written themselves (Part 1) frame a collection of contributions from a variety of writers and academics who seek to examine research perspectives on creativity in writing (Part 2), offer views on the creative practices of writers (Part 3) and reflect on creative writing pedagogy (Part 4). A final section (Part 5) attempts a broader context by examining such things as using travel for inspiration, how creativity can be assessed in college examinations and extending the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing degree beyond the boundaries of the United States.

The scope of the book and the range of contributors ensures that there is something for everyone who is interested in creative writing and in teaching writing to students. Here you will find everything from a discussion of the effect of brain diseases and their medical treatment on creativity, to suggestions for creativity-enhancing tools and techniques, to using underworld myths as a metaphor for the creative process, to facilitating student collaboration and peer feedback in poetry writing workshops.

Sky Marsen’s chapter, ‘Detecting the creative in written discourse’, counters one common misconception about writing: that creativity is irrelevant to writing outside specifically creative disciplines. She argues that creative techniques help writers to get their point across to their readers, and that this is just as important in academic and technical writing as it is in writing which is more conventionally catalogued as ‘creative’, such as poetry.

I particularly enjoyed the short chapter ‘Keeping the creative pipes from freezing’ by Martha Silano. This is an essay on creativity which addresses the problems of not having time to write and lacking inspiration. Her premise is that, just as it is a good idea to leave a tap dripping in extremely cold weather so that the pipes won’t freeze, so a writer should write something every day, even if it is just a few notes, to keep the ideas flowing through the creative pipes.

This is a book to dip into again and again, and it is one that I thoroughly recommend.

Louis Jacobs
Tel Aviv, Israel

Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ETp website and quote ETPQR0314 at the checkout.

When Vowels Get Together
by Bob Knowles
Bob Knowles 2014
978-1-49429-216-4

This book is written from the standpoint that the most common items in the English language, whether verbs, pronouns or whatever, are likely to be irregular or exceptional in some way, whilst the less common items – or those that are more formal – have a tendency to follow more predictable patterns. As a result, a beginner with a small vocabulary is likely to encounter more irregularities and exceptions than a more advanced student – a situation that seems unfair and potentially discouraging.

As the title suggests, the author looks at one area of potential confusion for students: the pronunciation of vowel sounds when vowels occur in pairs. Each section covers a single vowel sound which is just one of the various possible pronunciations of a given spelling. A percentage is given as part of the heading, to show roughly how common that particular pronunciation of the letter combination is amongst the words listed in the Macmillan English Dictionary. So, for example, of all the sounds (eight in
total) represented by the letters au in combination, the sound /ɔː/ is by far the most common at 71%. With this knowledge, students can make a more educated guess at the likely pronunciation of unknown words.

So, in each section, the author takes a particular pair of vowels and then lists the words containing this vowel combination that share a common sound, with the sounds listed in order of frequency. The Kindle version has all these words linked wherever possible to the Macmillan English Dictionary or other online dictionaries, thus providing a full phonemic transcription and an audio sample. Helpful notes at the end of each section deal with any anomalies, such as variant and inconsistent pronunciations and spellings, place names, borrowings from other languages and archaisms. The notes also provide the occasional useful definition of an unusual word.

I am often wary of books which offer a solution to the ‘problems’ of the English language, as they frequently seem to exacerbate the situation by asking students to follow some scheme or other that merely adds another layer of complication. However, I am prepared to believe that students will find this book genuinely helpful, and it may go some way towards countering the perception that the English language is entirely random in its pronunciation, full of traps and unexpected exceptions and that ‘you’ve just got to learn everything and hope for the best’.

Evangeline Morrissan
Halifax, UK

Workplace Skills Builder OPD
by Jayme Adelson-Goldstein,
Norma Shapiro and Marjorie Fuchs
Oxford University Press 2014
978-0-19-474075-3

Derived from the popular Oxford Picture Dictionary, this is a picture dictionary tailor-made for students preparing for the workplace. In addition to good-quality, full-colour illustrations of work-related vocabulary – everything from the general workplace to retail, hotels, restaurants, healthcare, construction, agriculture and the office – there are practice activities and suggestions for roleplays and pair practice to help students learn and internalise the new vocabulary and put it to immediate use.

Although the book is divided into sections according to the particular industry the words are most suited to, there is a lot of crossover between them. So, for example, the section on first aid and medical emergencies is likely to be relevant in all fields of work, not just to healthcare. A picture tells a thousand words and has to be the easiest way to teach a new item of lexis, but most picture dictionaries are aimed at a younger audience, so it is great to see a book that does this for adults, either already in the workplace or hoping to enter the workplace in an English-speaking environment.

Anthony Guzman
Toulouse, France

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Purging plagiarism

Michael Morgan persuades his students to take a principled stance.

Top-down instructional approaches to student plagiarism in English for academic purposes (EAP) are limited. The instructor warns the students not to plagiarise, and then punishes them when they do. An instructor may succeed in preventing a student from plagiarising a single assignment. A more successful instructor may prevent a student from plagiarising for an entire term, but there is no guarantee that the student will not plagiarise in the future. Some students merely learn to identify which teachers are strict on plagiarism and which are not. Persuading EAP students to take a principled stance on plagiarism is more effective in the long run and benefits everyone: concurrent with their academic integrity, the students’ skills in originating ideas will develop as they continue writing throughout their academic lives and their professional careers; and instructors become free to focus on the students’ writing skills, instead of spending time locating the sources of plagiarism.

This article explores the issue and introduces three strategies that can help student plagiarists become students who spurn plagiarism.

The problem of plagiarism

Plagiarism is the “third rail” in university or secondary school programmes that teach EAP. If students step on it, they may disappear through academic dismissal. On the other hand, if teachers who work in schools with revenue sensitivity enforce penalties on student plagiarists, those teachers’ jobs could be jeopardised. These worst-case scenarios show that plagiarism can be ruinous for both students and teachers.

Students are not the only members of the school community who might want to conceal plagiarism. School personnel may overlook plagiarism because they rely on retention and revenue and view students as customers. Consequences for plagiarism are not “customer service initiatives”. However, one could say that overlooking plagiarism hurts the prestige of the school, which attracts the customer in the first place. As teachers, our concerns should be student-centred. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence requiring a response from a teacher and a change from the student. Ignoring plagiarism simply encourages it.

Premature plagiarism

If we want to nip the problem in the bud, this discussion of plagiarism should not be limited to EAP in higher education, but must also include primary school writing. The role of technology in the lives of youngsters now makes plagiarism simple – and even fun to do. Writing homework? Copy, paste and submit to the teacher. If a child in primary school copies a writing assignment – no matter how brief the assignment – that child is discovering plagiarism, and possibly building a lifelong habit.

Plagiarism old and new

ELT instructors who taught writing before the advent of the internet are aware that books, newspapers and magazines can be as potent sources of plagiarism as any material copied from the web. Recalling information about plagiarism from the past helps teachers understand it today.

And plagiarism is old. According to Jack Lynch, the word plagiarism first appeared in England in 1601, when playwright and poet Ben Jonson used it to describe a “literary thief”. Around 80 ad, the Roman poet Martial used plagiarus to describe literary theft.

Lynch notes that before Martial, plagiarus meant “to kidnap one’s slaves”. So plagiarism originated almost 2,000 years ago, because a wordsmith enslaved his words and struggled to defend them from other slave masters!

Nowadays, much is made of the collaborative nature of work, whether it is in the schoolroom or the boardroom. Susan Bloom points out that “sharing and transmitting materials of all sorts – music, video, text, images – has become routine with the development of computers and the internet”. These activities are shared by producers and consumers alike. Students do not have to buy music: they can download it for free and share it with anybody. Rappers do not ‘plagiarise’ melodies from traditional musicians: they merely ‘sample’ melodies. So why can’t students ‘share’ an author’s thesis by copying it and tacking on a few new words? This is new plagiarism.

Finally, here is an example of not-so-new plagiarism. Paul McCartney famously said the Beatles were “the biggest nickers in town. Plagiarists extraordinaires”, as reported by CNN. The popular band intertwined music from their contemporaries into many of their songs. McCartney gives several examples of their plagiarised songs. During the 1970s, I was at once an academic student and a Beatles fan, with teachers who would have failed me straightaway had I used the Beatles’ musical thefts as a defence for plagiarising writing assignments. Academic plagiarism does not equate to plagiarism in real life.

The equal opportunity academic offence

Certain ELT students tell me that copying papers and assignments is acceptable in their country, yet other students from the...
Purging plagiarism

same country tell me they would be failed and, possibly, suspended for it. Academic integrity cannot be restricted by the students’ ethnicity. To allow plagiarism from some students but forbid it from others sends a prejudicial message to all students.

ELT instructors should, therefore, not exempt students from Eastern cultures from plagiarism rules. Alastair Pennycook sees plagiarism as a Western notion, and believes Western ELT instructors who impose policies against plagiarism discriminate against and disrespect the values of Eastern education. Certainly, teachers need to be aware of Eastern views on plagiarism. However, if EAP teachers are preparing students to succeed in Western schools, it would be remiss of them to accept plagiarised assignments from Eastern students.

I agree with Pennycook that ‘all language learning is to some extent a process of borrowing other words and we need to be flexible, not dogmatic, about where we draw boundaries between acceptable or unacceptable textual borrowing’. The amount of flexibility should be decided by the teacher. You could decide that papers interspersed with statistics demand laser-cutting truth coming from citations. At the opposite end of the plagiarism spectrum, ‘Brief quotes ... do not constitute plagiarism’ according to plagiarism law and legal definition in the USA, and you could decide to exclude brief quotes from your policy. I recommend that ELT teachers consider the notion of flexibility posed by Pennycook. My own flexibility is tempered by assignments that display little effort by the student writers and lots of effort from the plagiarised writers.

Show and tell

Sometimes EAP teachers hear the excuse ‘I’ve never heard of plagiarism’. I recommend distributing a handout to every student that clearly defines plagiarism and establishes your policy regarding it at the beginning of the term. Put your plagiarism policy in the hands of your students, instead of transmitting it electronically. If teachers only rely on technical communication, students can claim that a computer glitch prevented them from receiving the policy. Call on different students to read different paragraphs from the policy aloud in class. Revisit this exercise during the term.

Your policy should clearly define plagiarism and its consequences. On page 48 is a plagiarism policy template for university programmes. Feel free to copy this and adapt it for your own needs, but please cite the source!

Dealing with plagiarism

I have left the second- and third-time consequences in this template incomplete. The consequences of plagiarism in your own classes are something that you need to determine for yourself.

Although the template suggests increasing the severity of the consequences for second- and third-time offences, recidivist plagiarism can still provide teachable moments.

So, what do you do after a student repeatedly and blatantly plagiarises assignments? The ELT teacher may feel trapped by two bad choices. First, escalate an uphill battle with the student by resorting to drastic actions like failing them or initiating academic dismissal. The second choice is inaction. The teacher can ignore the problem and pass the student and their plagiaristic tricks on to future teachers. Neither of these choices addresses the problem. Both break the connection between student and teacher, which is crucial to solving it.

When an ELT teacher is confronted with a student plagiarist who gives no indication of changing their ways, it is time to find a new way of communicating with the student. As Desmond Tutu says: ‘Don’t raise your voice, improve your argument.’

Establish a more effective connection with the plagiarist. Choose a location where the student feels safe before you broach the subject. Find a private office or classroom where you can talk. Banish the word ‘plagiarist’ from your mind as you converse with the ‘student’.

The writing process involves much more than citing sources. Aim higher. Liberate the student to become the primary source of their writing assignments. Avoid what Paulo Freire calls ‘transferrals of information’ and help the students generate ‘acts of cognition’. You can empower your students to become writers who spurn plagiarism with these three strategies:

1. Give voice to plagiarism

   ● The first step to liberating a student from plagiarism is to give it voice. Ask the student to narrate the plagiarised passage(s) to you. Guard them from embarrassment by pointing out that there is no audience besides the two of you. There may be pronunciation problems, but do not give corrections.

   ● Often students attempt to negotiate by admitting to plagiarising some sentences but not other sentences, despite proof. Negotiation is not part of the strategy. ELT students should not chip away at plagiarism. They should drop it.

   ● Ask the student to glance at you as frequently as they are able while reading the plagiarised passage(s) aloud. Most likely you will receive few, if any, glances from the student.

   ● Ignore long pauses or requests for pronunciation assistance. Ignore silence. Let the student listen to their own silence. If this makes the student or you uncomfortable, remember that the alternatives of failure or dismissal are fraught with much more discomfort. When the plagiarised narration ends, initiate a dialogue with the student. Sit with the student so that eye contact is at an equal level.

2. Design the dialogue to exclude teacher judgement

   ● The first purpose of the dialogue is to have the student reflect on the emotional state they experienced during their narration of the plagiarised material. Let them subjectively describe the experience of the narration. You must remain non-judgemental, even if pressed by the student for feedback. Ask open-ended questions, such as ‘Why do you think you stuttered?’ or ‘How come you were at times silent?’ In my experience, when students read
Focus on original material

Have the student narrate the plagiarised assignment again, but now tell them to speak only those passages containing their own original material. If the original material is too slim, ask them to say a few sentences about their own ideas on the topic using simple words. Wait until the words are clear enough to be understood. Here is an example of a first attempt that is incorrect: ‘Actuary to finance companies need consult mathematics majoring.’ You may have to wait a while until the student clarifies their idea with simple words, such as ‘I want to be an actuary because I like maths and want to help people start new businesses in my country’. If the student attempts direct translation or complains they don’t know how to say the words in English, repeat this vocabulary confidence-boosting mantra: ‘Use simple words you already know.’

Many ELT students believe high-level vocabulary is the essential component to academic writing. To disabuse them of this belief, turn their writing assignment face down on a desk or tabletop. Ask them to repeat what they want to say in short sentences with simple words. Copy the spoken words on the back of the paper. When it is simple and clear enough to be understood, tell the student to read the sentences aloud.

After this follow-up narration, give the student time to reflect on their written and spoken thoughts. Reflection builds self-confidence by giving the students’ own ideas importance. Have the student say more sentences using vocabulary they truly understand, and assure them you understand their ideas. Encourage them to explore the topic by brainstorming with you. Latch onto any idea that they can elaborate upon, as long as it points to the topic. Cogitation transforms students from plagiarists to writers. It takes time, but eliciting the students’ ideas will have a lasting impact.

Establish the simple hierarchy of writing sources. ELT students need to be the primary source of their own writing assignments. Any outside source must serve them, not vice versa. Remind them that an outside source is secondary or tertiary. Remind them that outside sources must be cited.

Wrap up your discussion with the student with a brief review of the three strategies listed above. Does the student know what plagiarism involves? If not, have them repeat the plagiarised passages from their writing assignment.

Have the student explain why they now feel that plagiarism is unacceptable. Make sure the student is convinced that their original ideas are important enough to replace the plagiarised ideas.

Lastly, does the student know how to cite outside sources, if sources are required in the writing assignment?

Conclude the review by giving the student a copy of some peer writing with interesting, unplagiarised ideas. Make sure the peer copy is not over-sourced. Let them read other ELT students’ ideas in simple words that they can understand.

The three strategies listed above succeed when the student internalises academic honesty for writing assignments. These strategies are not a cure-all for plagiarism, but they demonstrate positive approaches to addressing the issue. If the student continues to plagiarise, you know that you have done everything possible to help them and the consequences are now fully justified. If you have to resort to these consequences, do not think of them as repressive. Occasionally, they may be the only actions that will free a student from plagiarism.

For the most part, I have found that when I show students that I care about their personal problem with plagiarism, and I show that I care by employing strategies to help them, the students change. They do not want to copy papers. They want to write papers. That is the way students learn to spurn plagiarism.
Plagiarism policy

Plagiarism is a serious matter at universities. Read the following material carefully, to avoid having a problem with plagiarism while you are at the University of ________________________________.

Among the most serious academic offences is plagiarism, submitting the work of another author or source without acknowledgement or formal documentation. Plagiarism occurs when specific phrases or entire passages – whether a sentence, paragraph or longer excerpt – are incorporated into one’s own writing without quotation marks or documentation. One also plagiarises by paraphrasing the work of another, that is, using another writer’s ideas and structure without documentation.

Students are advised always to set off another writer’s exact words by quotation marks, with appropriate references. Students avoid plagiarism by concentrating on their own words and ideas and by fully crediting others’ words and ideas when they find their way into the writing. Whenever in doubt, cite (ie include the name of) the source.

If you have any questions about this policy, please ask your instructor.

Here is an example of plagiarism:

The student reads in a print or online magazine a sentence that says:
A study reported that 45% of university students who take important tests often feel extreme anxiety.

The student writes in his or her paper or other class work:
Everyone knows that 45% of university students who take important tests often feel extreme anxiety.

This is plagiarism. The student uses the words of another writer and does not include the other author’s name in his or her work.

This is an example of how to avoid plagiarism:

The student reads in a print or online magazine a sentence that says:
A study reported that 45% of university students who take important tests often feel extreme anxiety.

The reader knows that the student took the information from Time magazine. The information in parentheses tells the reader the name of the author of the article in Time and the page number on which the student read the information. Online articles follow the same guidelines as for printed articles, according to the APA (American Psychological Association). Include all information the online host makes available, including an issue number in parentheses.

The APA style will be studied and used in this class. There are other styles, such as MLA (Modern Language Association) or OSCOLA (Oxford University Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities). There are different ways to cite sources. If you make a mistake in formatting how you cite a source, do not worry. Formatting errors are not plagiarism. If you do not cite a source, that is plagiarism.

Note: Do not ask anyone to write any part of your papers or class work. If someone writes words for you, it will be considered the same as plagiarism and will have the same consequences.

Consequences of plagiarism

First time:
A first offence of plagiarism will be dealt with by your teacher. Depending on the assignment (eg draft or final essay), the teacher will re-assign the work or issue a grade of F. The teacher may refer the student to _____________, if necessary.

Second time:
If a student commits a second offence of plagiarism ...

Third time:
If a student commits a third offence of plagiarism ...
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Collaboration. In exams, it’s not a good idea, but in almost all other situations, it’s essential. Just think of going into a shop to buy something and having the shop assistant ignore you? All right, I know that can and does happen often, though their attention can usually be had eventually – but imagine if shop assistants refused ever to acknowledge our existence. We would be unable to buy anything we needed. It’s an interesting exercise to imagine going through an entire day without the collaboration or cooperation of anyone. Very frustrating!

Toothpick, anyone?
The Egyptian crocodile suns itself on the banks of a river. To keep cool (as its skin doesn’t allow it to get rid of heat by perspiring), it lies there with its huge mouth wide open. Being a meat-eater, it tends to get bits of its last meal stuck in its teeth – its arms are too short to apply a toothbrush – which is where the local plovers come in. These birds apply their sharp little beaks to extracting the remnants of food from between the crocodile’s teeth; this has the double effect of giving them a good meal and giving the crocodile’s mouth a good clean. Both parties benefit!

Elephant antics
One of the most curious partnerships – curious when you consider the relative sizes of the protagonists – concerns elephants and ants. Here, the actual partnership is between an ant and an African tree. In mythology, there are many glorious pictures of quivering elephants perched on chairs to get away from mice. In reality, the quivering is much more likely to be induced by insects, which can bite or sting the various sensitive parts of an elephant, such as the underside of its trunk. Elephants have been known to run away from the sound of bees. One particular type of acacia tree benefits from this aversion by hosting a species of ant: the tree provides shelter and nourishment and, in return, the elephants stay away. This is highly desirable because the elephant is an over-enthusiastic eater, known to strip bark completely from the trees on whose leaves it is feasting.

Mobile restaurant
A watery pairing occurs between the remora and large fish such as sharks. The remora is a slender fish, growing up to around a metre in length, with a large suction pad on its head. It attaches itself to the larger fish and hitchets a lift. It then feeds on the leavings of its host’s meals, and can also eat the external parasites to be found on many large sea creatures. Another case of mutual benefit!

Beneficial bees
Nearer home, there is a rather one-sided collaboration with the pollination of plants by insects, particularly bees. The bees busily go from flower to flower, plant to plant, helping themselves to some nectar and spreading pollen between the plants as they go. The expression the bee’s knees (meaning something or someone really special) refers to the sacs on a bee’s legs which it uses to transport the precious nectar.

Socially, bees are fascinating creatures – they send out scouts to find food, which then direct the rest of the swarm in the direction of the food source by performing a special dance in front of them.

Humans in harmony
And then we get back to the biggest collaborators of all – humans! So many activities involve detailed collaboration between individuals. One of the most striking is, I think, an orchestra. There are up to 120 highly skilled, trained and gifted individuals, all with something important to say musically; yet they work together to subsume their individuality into a whole, which is indeed much greater than the sum of its parts …
Linguistic collaboration

As this is a magazine about English language teaching, we should not forget that words themselves collaborate in our use of everyday language. Can you finish the pairing in these collocations? (Hint: they are all connected with food.)

1. Bacon and ...
2. As different as chalk and ...
3. Bangers (sausages) and ...
4. Making a mess of things is making a dog’s ...
5. There’s no such thing as a free ...
6. Bed and ...

What do you get if you cross ...?

Collaboration jigsaw

Humankind are great tinkerers. A favourite sphere is that of cross-breeding, and there are a number of well-known examples. Strictly speaking, collaboration is perhaps an inaccurate word to use for those examples not found in the wild!

The best-known example of this artificial breeding is probably the mule: the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. Horses and donkeys are different species, with different numbers of chromosomes. Of the two hybrids between these two species, a mule is easier to obtain than a hinny (the offspring of a male horse and a female donkey). All male mules and most female mules are infertile. An aficionado of the mule claims that they are ‘more patient, sure-footed, hardy and long-lived than horses, and they are considered less obstinate, faster, and more intelligent than donkeys’.

Newer projects include:

Beefalo – the fertile hybrid offspring of domestic cattle and the American bison (generally called a buffalo in the US). The breed was created to combine the characteristics of both animals, with a view towards better beef production.

Savannah cat – the name given to the offspring of a domestic cat and a serval – a medium-sized, large-eared wild African cat. This unusual cross became popular among breeders at the end of the 20th century, and in 2001 the International Cat Association accepted it as a new registered breed. Savannahs are much more social than typical domestic cats, and they are often compared to dogs in their loyalty. They can be trained to walk on a leash and even taught to play fetch (a scary thought!)

Dzo – a hybrid of yak and domestic cattle. The word dzo technically refers to a male hybrid, while a female is known as a dzomo or zhom. Dzomo are fertile, while dzo are sterile. They are larger and stronger than either cattle or yak.

Zebroid (also zedonk, zebra mule and zebrule) – the offspring of any cross between a zebra and any other equine: essentially, a zebra hybrid. In most cases, the sire is a zebra stallion. Zebroid is the generic name for all zebra hybrids.

To be fair, the fashion for interbreeding did start in the wild:

The liger is a naturally-occurring hybrid cross between a male lion (Panthera leo) and a tigeress (Panthera tigris). Thus, it has parents with the same genus but of different species. It is the largest of all known extant felines. Ligers enjoy swimming, which is a characteristic of tigers, and are very sociable, like lions. Ligers exist now only in captivity because the habitats of the parental species no longer overlap in the wild. Historically, when the Asiatic lion was prolific, the territories of lions and tigers did overlap and there are legends of ligers existing in the wild.

A wholphin or wolphin is a rare hybrid, born from the mating of a female bottlenose dolphin with a male false killer whale. Although they have been reported to exist in the wild, there are currently only two in captivity, both at Sea Life Park in Hawaii.

A grizzly-polar bear hybrid is a rare ursid hybrid that has occurred both in captivity and in the wild. In 2006, the occurrence of this hybrid in nature was confirmed by testing the DNA of a strange-looking bear that had been shot in the Canadian Arctic.

Can you or your students invent a new animal cross-breed and think of a good name for it?
Collaboration Jigsaw

Tell the students to work in pairs and discuss the following quotations. Ask them what the common theme is (collaboration/teamwork) and elicit whether they like/dislike them or agree/disagree with any of them:

1. ‘The secret is to gang up on the problem, not on each other.’ (Thomas Stallkamp)
2. ‘We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull while others are bright, some have weird names, but we all have to learn to live in the same box. ’ (Anonymous)
3. ‘Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.’ (Helen Keller)
4. ‘Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.’ (Ryunosuke Satoro)
5. ‘We can do so little; together we can do so much.’ (Helen Keller)

Hand out the squares at random and ask each student to draw an exact replica of the square they receive, but five times larger. They should not consult anyone else while they do this.

Collect the original squares of the photo and ask the students to work in a team to reconstruct the original by using the squares they have drawn. They will not have any idea how their piece contributes to the whole, and will have to discuss how they think the pieces might fit together – and what they think is happening in the photo (it shows a courtroom scene from a play).

When they are satisfied with their arrangement, allow them to compare it with the original. Have a discussion of how easy or difficult the task was, and how much teamwork was required to achieve the end result. You could use this particular photo to teach some legal vocabulary. Of course, the activity can be done with a picture or photo of your choice.
Write for us

We are always looking for fresh ideas that will appeal to our readers. Whether you are an experienced writer or a practising teacher with something to say, we would like to hear from you. We cannot promise to publish your article, but we do promise to read it carefully!

General guidance

The best advice we can give is ‘Read ETp’. If you are already a subscriber – and we hope you are – you will know that we publish a wide range of features and articles dealing with practical classroom issues, professional and personal development, methodology, pedagogy, technology, language and linguistics, teaching resources – and a lot more besides.

Our readership

ETp is read by teachers in more than 120 countries around the world. Some of them are native speakers of English. Many of them are not. We have readers in most sectors – from primary school to university – but the majority teach in upper and lower secondary schools and in language schools or similar institutions.

Reader friendly

We are looking for articles that are of direct relevance and immediate interest to teachers in the classroom.

Our aim is to be fresh and accessible. Teachers usually do not have time to read lengthy pieces or weighty prose. Please write clearly and simply, and avoid – or explain – technical terms or jargon. We are less likely to accept an article that says ‘This is what we did’ than one that says ‘This is what we did and here’s how you can do it too/adapt it to your situation, etc.’ Please avoid long lists of references and bibliographies.

Editorial support

We work with our authors to ensure that the articles we publish are as good as we can make them. We very seldom publish an article in exactly the form in which it was submitted. If you need help or support, we will be pleased to offer both. Our advice is to send us a draft or an outline in the first instance, so that we can help you to develop your ideas. Sending an outline is also a good idea because it enables us to warn you if we already have several articles on the same subject waiting to be published, and are unlikely to accept another one.

Starting point

You may wish to submit shorter pieces to begin with. We are very pleased to receive letters and suggestions for publication, and contributions to the TALKBACK! and IT WORKS IN PRACTICE sections of the magazine. Good, innovative photocopiable materials are particularly welcome.

Article length

Most articles in ETp are between one and three pages in length, although we occasionally publish both shorter and longer articles. Approximate word counts are as follows:

- One page: around 850 words
- Two pages: around 1,400 words
- Three pages: around 2,200 words

If illustrations or diagrams are required, please reduce the word count to compensate.

Regular features

Please contact us before contributing to one of our regular features as these are generally commissioned by us and their content planned several issues in advance. Please write to us also if you have new ideas for regular features.

Selection of articles

Articles sent in to us are circulated to an editorial team and considered for publication. We try to let you know our decision as quickly as possible, but you may not receive an immediate response.

Please bear in mind that we receive many more articles than we can possibly publish. We only produce six issues a year and there is a limited amount of space in each issue. We also have to balance the content of each issue to ensure that there is something of interest to everyone. This means that even when we accept your article, you may have to wait some time before you see it in print. Please be patient. It is very unlikely to go into the next issue or even the issue after that, but if we have accepted an article, we will get it in as soon as possible.

If we do not accept your article, it may be simply because we have several others on a similar subject waiting to be published or we can see that it will be so long before we can fit your article in that you would be better seeking publication elsewhere.

If you want to be published quickly, it is often a good idea to submit an article to one of the following sections: teaching young learners, business English, teacher development and technology. We are often looking for articles to fill these sections, and we are particularly interested in photocopiable activities.

Submitting articles

We accept articles by email, but if you decide to send one this way, please ensure that anything you send is free of viruses.

Please do not use the track changes tool on your computer and do not allow any of your colleagues who read and comment on your article to do so, as it can cause issues.

If you do send anything by email attachment, please use your surname as part of the file name and include your name and address within the document. You would be amazed how many articles come in with the file name ‘ETp article’ and with no means of identification!

Please do not embed photographs or any other artwork in Word documents sent by e-mail attachment. Send them as separate jpg attachments or send them as hard copy by post.

Please remember to put your name and full contact details, including postal address and telephone number, within the body of your article. Emails and articles often get separated and it is vital that your article is labelled clearly with your name and contact details.

Additional advice

Think how your article will look on the page. Our designer will make your article look good, but you can help by including bullet points, diagrams, tables, ideas for illustrations and photographs.

Copyright

We do not accept articles or parts of articles which have been published elsewhere. When we accept an article, we ask you to confirm that it is your own work and to assign copyright to us. This helps us to keep track of where articles taken from ETp are used. If we receive a request to reprint your article, we will always consult you and will share any fees involved. Further information about this is available on request.

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All this information can be found at: www.etprofessional.com and click on ‘Write for us’
Warming up your cold-calling feet

Christina Rebuffet-Broadus helps you get a foot in the door.

Although language trainers specialise in communication, the thought of being our own salespeople for the services we offer can make us cringe. Picking up the phone to call potential clients, we suddenly greatly sympathise with our trainees who say ‘I hate calling people when it’s not in my language! I can’t do it!’ But if you just sit and wait for the clients to come to you, your business may not last very long!

Starting out

Increasingly, human resources managers are looking for someone they can build a relationship with, someone who listens to their needs, not just someone to sell them a programme. One way to spark this relationship is by not selling anything at all in the initial contact. Treat it as an informational interview, where you are not so much trying to sell your teaching services as to find out what the potential client’s needs are. Listen and take notes, don’t sell. Not yet, anyway!

Like a journey into uncharted territory, it can be helpful to have a map to guide you. Here’s a quick guide to cold-calling that I used those first few times I had to reach out and connect with potential clients. We’ll then look at each step in more detail:

1. Find the name of the person you need to contact.
2. Send them a letter or an email, depending on local business culture.
3. Follow up with a phone call to get an appointment.
4. Go to the appointment ready to listen.

1. Get to know your contact by name

Before you make contact, find out who exactly you want to meet. The best and most successful technique (which I learnt from Joss Frimond of Linguaid in France) is through referral. When you finish a training course, ask your trainee or their training manager if they know three people in other companies who may also be interested in your services. Then, ask your client to mention you to these potential clients.

If your trainee knows other employees in a company, but doesn’t know the training manager, get in contact with the potential new trainee first. Since they know your past trainee, they will probably be more open to talking with you – you have a mutual acquaintance. Then, you can find out from the potential trainee who you need to speak to at their company to discuss setting up a training programme. Remember, referrals and mutual acquaintances always give higher success rates than approaches to strangers.

If that fails, work your network. By belonging to professional networks (as all freelancers should), you may be lucky enough to bump into someone who works at the company you want to target, or at least someone who knows someone who works there. Ask around – you may be surprised who knows whom.

2. Make that first contact

In some cultures, this should be done with a printed letter sent through the post. In others, it will be preferable to use email. In either case, this first contact serves simply to get your name into their head and to show that you have a mutual acquaintance so that when you call, you aren’t completely unknown. The letter or email should be short and simple so that the reader doesn’t need to spend a lot of time or energy trying to figure out what you want, but it should also pique their interest. The sample letter in the box below can give you some ideas to get started on your own letter/email. Bear in mind that you may need to translate and/or adapt it to your local language and business culture.

Sample first contact letter

Dear (name of person),

I am contacting you on behalf of mutual acquaintance’s name, who recently completed a training programme with me. He/She was very satisfied and mentioned that you may be interested in English training as well. He/She specifically suggested I contact you to discuss your possible training needs.

As (your job title), I’ve been helping clients include the most relevant skill that you help clients develop) for more than (number) of years. With my help, my clients, such as (mutual acquaintance’s name), have become better at (list a few relevant achievements that you’ve helped clients with). I have the feedback to prove it. (Make sure you can bring proof of this to the meeting, just in case?)

I will soon phone you so that we may find a convenient time to meet with each other, as I know our conversation will be mutually beneficial.

Kind regards,

(Your name)
3 Follow up on the written contact

If you send a letter, wait a working week to call the company. If you send an email, call in the next day or so. Plan to call on the least busy days of the week – Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, for example.

Calling is the hard part. Prepare for several scenarios so as not to be caught off guard. As David Rosen, the ‘happiest cold caller in the world’ suggests, write your script if you must, but quickly throw it out. Commit key points to memory, but don’t sound like you’re reading a text. People notice. And they don’t like it.

The people you are most likely to encounter are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The people you may meet

Below are some common responses that you may get when you ask to speak to the person you wrote to, as well as ideas on how to respond. Of course, the scenarios are not limited to the people indicated. For example, the person you wish to speak to may put up the same barriers as the assistant.

The secretary or receptionist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secretary/receptionist</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘What is the subject of your call?’</td>
<td>It’s about a letter/email that I addressed to Mr/Mrs X last week, after a referral from (name of mutual acquaintance) whom we both know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘And what was the letter about?’</td>
<td>It’s about [the creation of] a training programme. I’d like to make an appointment with Mr/Mrs X to discuss their needs in [cite information you found in your research on the company].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, the secretary will either seem like your friend or your enemy. If they are willing to cooperate, acknowledge their efforts with something like ‘I really appreciate your help – I suppose you understand how important this appointment is’. If, however, they act more like a barrier, try using a little ‘technical’ language so that the secretary sees a clear reason for your call but also realises that they themselves won’t be able to discuss the subject with you. Mentioning things like ‘blended learning’ or ‘optimising the training budget’ can sometimes break the secretary/receptionist barrier.

The insider assistant (who may or may not know about your letter/email)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘What exactly is it that you want?’</td>
<td>(Name of mutual acquaintance) referred me to Mr/Mrs X simply find out if there is any way I can help regarding [mention situations similar to those you cited in your letter].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Why don’t you send us a brochure and we’ll have a look at it.’</td>
<td>In fact, my objective is to help Mr/Mrs X regarding [mention situations similar to those you cited in your letter]. Without talking to Mr/Mrs X, I can’t know exactly what information would best respond to their needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘We already have a training provider.’</td>
<td>‘I imagine so. I’m not trying to replace them, but maybe there’s a way I can complement what they offer with specific training regarding [mention situations similar to those you cited in your letter].’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Mr/Mrs X isn’t available.’</td>
<td>‘When can I call back?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned above, you may have to talk to more than one person during a single phone call. It can sound silly, but find a partner (preferably another freelancer in another business) to practise with – it’ll be helpful for both parties!

4 Go the appointment ready to listen

You promised your potential client to listen to their needs, you said you didn’t want to push a product on them, and they’ve been kind enough to give you some of their time. While you can, of course, mention your services, don’t be a ‘pushy salesperson’. Approach the meeting almost as market research – you want to know what your potential
Warming up your cold-calling feet

clients are looking for and you want to know what’s missing with their current or past providers.

You’ll need to think about your own context, what types of training you are able to provide and what is customarily done in your area so as to get information that is pertinent for you. It can be helpful to think of the conversation as an inverted triangle. General questions come first and they progressively lead to more specific information. One possible approach is shown in Figure 2.

In the first step of the conversation, let the client express themselves, but have a few questions prepared to guide the conversation and collect key information. Also, by asking similar questions to various potential clients, you’ll be sure to have comparable information across your notes for each interview. Possible questions to help start the conversation include:

- What kind of training do you offer employees?
- Who makes decisions about training?
- Who participates in training sessions?
- When are decisions made regarding training sessions?
- What types of providers do you prefer to solicit (big international companies, independent trainers, etc)?

As for the second and third stages of the discussion, again it can be helpful to prepare in advance to help guide the conversation. Without questions about specific points, clients tend to say ‘Everything’s fine’. You may want to create a chart that you can save, print and take to each interview. The chart in Figure 3 is an example – it’s best to create your own, with subjects that relate to local expectations and training culture.

Remember that this interview serves several purposes: to introduce yourself to the potential client, to learn about the potential client’s needs and, possibly, to begin a fruitful relationship. By showing that you are genuinely interested in knowing your client’s needs and how you can best answer them, you send the message that you truly want to help them, not just sell them a product.

To sum up, you’ll need to do a bit of research and preparation throughout the process. The first step to success is finding who exactly to contact and then mentally preparing for that telephone call. Once you’ve scheduled an appointment, map out the conversation you want to have with the potential client to ensure that you gather the most pertinent information. Once you’ve done all your research, you’ll be in prime position to offer services that really match the company’s needs. By doing that, you’ll transform that potential client into a happy business partner.

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Figure 2
Triangle conversation structure

![Triangle conversation structure diagram](image)

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Figure 3 Discussion chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfactions</th>
<th>Dissatisfactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainer’s skills and knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to trainees’ expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulations, roleplays and pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of training sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training materials used in sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between the company and the training provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-training reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided on the training sessions before they begin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer’s consideration of remarks and suggestions made by trainees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Grossman, J ‘There’s no such thing as a wrong number’ Retrieved from
www.inc.com/magazine/20100701/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-wrong-number_pagen_3.html 2010

Christina Rebuffet-Broadus has been training French clients since 2004. She went freelance in 2012, and quickly realised the necessity for freelance trainers to develop marketing skills. She has two blogs: ilovetefl.wordpress.com (for teachers) and christinarebuffet.com (for learners).

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Summer madness?

Nicola Prentis explains why managing a summer school might be a sensible move.

After a hard year’s teaching, there’s no denying the appeal of a month or two off in the summer – especially if you’re lucky enough to have a year-round job with paid summer holidays. But, if you want to see what a position in management is like, summer could be the best time to dip your toe in.

If you’re wondering about changing path, but hesitant about leaving the classroom behind, summer school offers an intense trial period. If you don’t like it, you’ve only lost a few weeks. Even for someone happy in their year-round job, the experience gained by giving up a month in the summer could open doors to promotion or a pay rise back home. And, of course, the extra money is a huge plus.

Suitability

In the UK, summer schools, even good ones, struggle to fill DOS and Academic Manager positions with staff who are both qualified and suited to the role. Management isn’t for everyone, but can you have what it takes if you’ve never done anything like it before? The answer might well be yes, but many applicants apply for teaching positions because they wrongly assume they’re not eligible for a senior role.

In year-round schools, this is often true. Management positions come up so rarely that experience is the key factor in securing a job. Summer schools just can’t afford to be that picky because the explosion of jobs in July and August means demand outweighs supply. They have to look for people who they think they can train at induction, which means that skills and character traits can carry as much weight as experience.

As Academic Consultant for one of the top five summer schools in the UK, I helped seek out potential Academic Managers. And, with six years running a centre, I learnt what makes a good manager and what makes for a disaster. So what do you need to do the job?

Requirements

British Council rules require that you have the equivalent of a DELTA, which includes observed teaching. Obviously, you must also have the legal right to work in the UK. There are no ways round the ‘right to work’ requirement, but, in cases of dire need, if the Centre Director above you has the appropriate qualification and can do your lesson observations for you, you might be hired even if you don’t meet the qualification requirements.

I get asked a lot if it matters whether an applicant is a native speaker. Absolutely not, but native speaker proficiency is essential. In 2014, the school I worked for had a Polish Senior Academic Manager overseeing seven Academic Managers, three of whom were non-native speakers (Spanish, Greek and Polish). Aside from the fact that it’s illegal in Europe to advertise jobs only for native speakers, it simply isn’t necessary for the job.
Summer madness?

Skills

The other language you need to be proficient in is IT. Managers who fail at the job are usually those who get stressed out by having to do anything more challenging than open an email. You need to have a basic working knowledge of Word and Excel and the computer sense to check your work emails regularly. Be honest with yourself about your computer capabilities, as this is not something that can be taught at induction.

The next skill you need is the ability to lead and make decisions. Again, this means honestly evaluating yourself. You’ll be in charge from the moment you introduce yourself to your staff at induction. You might be managing returning staff with much more knowledge of the school than you, and any sign of weakness, hesitation or lack of confidence on Day 1 can end up in full-scale mutiny by Week 3. I’ve seen a manager so afraid of the job that she couldn’t even say her name in front of 200 people at the general induction without her voice faltering. She didn’t last long.

She was English so, again, being a native speaker has no connection with doing the job well. However, there is some evidence that the character people take on in another language can be different from the one they have in their mother tongue. Someone might be brusque or come across as domineering in English. Or the reverse: they might be more hesitant and less sure of themselves. These things won’t translate well in the job. Think about how you feel in English and how you see yourself when expressing your ‘English self’ if you’re not a native speaker.

Communication with your staff isn’t the only thing to be thinking about. How well each member fits into the whole team is a huge part of the success of the high-pressure environment of summer school. Ask yourself if your personality suits this quite extrovert requirement. A cheerful demeanor is critical. Are you generally a positive person? If so, you’ll do well at summer school and come out of it with a great reference. It almost counts for more than being brilliant at every aspect of the job.

The last skill you need is organisation. There might not be anyone around post-induction to help you assimilate all the information, so it’s up to you to put it in a manageable format for yourself. If you’re the type who makes lists and schedules, you’ll get on well. Typically speaking, the job will involve placement testing and class allocation; assigning teachers to classes and managing the changeover if classes are shared; making sure reports and registers are done on time by the teachers; dealing with parent enquiries and students moving level. In the pressure cooker of summer school, perhaps managing teachers with very little experience post-TEFL-qualification, the only way to stay on top of the workload is to be calm and organised.

When to apply

One more thing to remember is that even applying late might not be a problem. Summer schools open recruitment early on in the year so you might think, if your application isn’t in by Easter, that you’ve either missed out entirely or only lower-quality schools are still hiring. Aside from the incredibly high demand for qualified applicants, you’d be surprised to learn the dropout rate of successful candidates. It’s even more shocking how close to the beginning of summer these can occur, leaving positions open and a last-minute scramble for managers. You might find yourself able to negotiate a shorter contract so you can fit it into your annual leave.

Where to look

The key for anyone looking at taking this mini-step is choosing the right school. The usual TEFL recruitment websites are a good place to start to see what’s on offer. Then you need to narrow them down to those that will help you gain what you want from your summer. Here are some things to help:

- The British Council inspects summer schools every four years and the results are published on their website: www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation/centres. Look for ‘strengths’ in the parts of the reports that refer to Management, Learning Resources and Teaching and Learning. If it’s been three years since they were inspected, there’s the likelihood of having to deal with an inspection in your first summer, which is a pressure you might not want. On the other hand, it’s great for your CV!
- The EL Gazette runs regular articles on the quality of schools, and it came to the conclusion that the best summer schools are those that spring from year-round private boarding schools, as they have an infrastructure already in place. These might be better than chains you’ve heard of, but which open a large number of schools in July that disappear in August.
- Find out how long the induction is. A school that cares enough to give a one-week induction to its managers is going to be much more professional than one that has the managers and teachers turn up and do some ice-breakers one day before the students start arriving.

As a testing ground for your own personal development, professional development or as a doorway to a higher-paid job, I can’t think of a better place than summer school. If it’s not for you, at least you’ve found that out in just a few weeks, rather than being stuck in a job you can’t leave because of the holes it will create in your CV.

Nicola Prentis has taught for over ten years, including six summers as a DOS and Centre Director. She is an Academic Consultant to summer schools and a materials writer, with two graded readers and a self-study speaking skills book published by HarperCollins.

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The aim of this article is to introduce and describe the Word Family Framework (WFF), a new British Council vocabulary resource related to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This is a free, online resource for teachers and students, which aligns over 26,000 vocabulary items with the levels of the CEFR. In particular, I will address the following questions:

- What is the WFF?
- How does it work?
- What are its practical features?
- What are the vocabulary strategies that students need in order to learn vocabulary efficiently?

What is the WFF?

Vocabulary is not really central to the CEFR, which devotes fewer than three pages to ways in which learners might be expected or required to develop their vocabulary. This neglect seems strange, given the importance attached to vocabulary learning in other Council of Europe documents. For example, Jan van Ek and John Trim, in Vantage, the third level in a series on the specifications for the Council of Europe language learning programme, assert that ‘vocabulary extension may well constitute the greater part of the learning load required to pass from the earlier level to the present one’.

At the heart of the CEFR are some 60 ‘can do’ scales, describing various aspects of language, each related to six levels of performance from A1 (Breakthrough) to C2 (Mastery). Only two of these scales relate to vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Has a good command of a very broad lexical repertoire …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Has sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These descriptors are quantitative, yet the CEFR gives no quantities suggesting the number of vocabulary items needed at each level: there are no vocabulary examples or vocabulary lists that could form the basis of a vocabulary syllabus. Earlier Council of Europe documents, such as that by John Trim et al in 1980, had suggested the need, and even the methodology, for constructing such lists, and the authors of some documents (eg Threshold) had even drawn up a ‘word index’, but these are not included in the CEFR.
The aim of the WFF is to rectify this omission by producing a research-based, online vocabulary resource aligned to the levels of the CEFR. However, the vocabulary items are not arranged merely as a series of lists, but as a series of more than 6,600 word families, each showing how family members relate to the CEFR levels.

As can be seen in Figure 1, this horizontal entry includes not only the headword (example) but also derivatives (exemplify), fixed formulae (for example) and collocations (make an example of, set an example), each aligned with one of the CEFR levels. It was found that many useful items were off the A1–C2 scale, and so an additional level – level X (for ‘extra’) – has been included.

Thus, unlike a conventional word list or dictionary, the WFF is arranged in word families, so that related words can be seen together, including those which would normally be separated by conventional alphabetical order (witch/witch or, more commonly, a suffix (banker, banking)). Suffixes may include the so-called ‘zero suffix’, which is often used to change a word class in English (bank noun + ø suffix → bank verb).

Derivatives are formed by a prefix (witch/bewitch) or, more commonly, a suffix (banker, bankiting). Suffixes may include the so-called ‘zero suffix’, which is often used to change a word class in English (bank noun + ø suffix → bank verb).

Collocations, such as set an example.

### How does it work?

The WFF consists of a database of over 26,000 vocabulary items, which have been sorted into the levels of the CEFR. The 6,600 word families are arranged alphabetically, and it is possible to download and print out the entire WFF.

This would give you a document with over 750 pages, which could be searched manually like any other reference book. However, all of the items have been tagged so that the database can be searched online, enabling users to search it in various ways to meet their teaching/learning needs.

### What are the practical features?

The WFF is available online from the British Council’s Teaching English website. When opened, it offers users a screen which looks like the one shown in Figure 2.

This initial screen allows you to do three things with the WFF:

1. You can search for any word, and this will give the complete word family to which that word belongs (as in Figure 1).
2. You can download all the vocabulary items at any one level or any combination of levels, if, for example, you wish to have a vocabulary syllabus for levels A1 and A2, or B1 to C2.
3. You can download the entire WFF and then search it from your own computer at any time.

The WFF was constructed by searching 18 existing lexicons or vocabulary lists, all of them recent (1980–2010) and including publications from Britain, the USA, Europe, Germany and China. These lexicons had been constructed in various ways: the larger ones were purely objective and were based on word frequency, while others were purely subjective and were drawn up by panels of teachers and linguists, and some combined both objective and subjective criteria. These sources gave an initial research database of over 25,000 items, which were then aligned to the levels of the CEFR using the labels or the frequencies given in the original sources. These alignments were then compared. Where there was agreement between sources, the level was accepted for the WFF. When sources disagreed, frequency was used to determine an initial level, and an item was then given a higher or lower level by consulting the subjective sources. The result was that many really useful words, such as lazy, punctual and belief, were promoted to an earlier CEFR level. Marginal members of word families with low frequency or usefulness were allocated to level X, beyond C2.

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## Keeping it in the family

### Vocabulary-learning strategies

The WFF lists a very large number of items, and these can be searched and selected for teaching and learning vocabulary lists or syllabuses. The word family arrangement is believed to be more efficient than the purely alphabetical arrangement of dictionaries and conventional word lists. However, there are several strategies, apart from simple rote learning, which may make vocabulary learning easier and more efficient. These may be divided into ‘knowledge’ (knowledge about the English vocabulary system which makes it easier to understand how words are constructed and related) and ‘skills’ (strategies which can be used to understand unfamiliar words in spoken and written texts). These are summarised in Figure 3.

Here is a short activity to practise some of these strategies. The students should work in pairs.

### Pre-reading

1. What meanings can you think of for these words: milk, waste and plant? (Indicate the part of speech and arrange them into different word families.)

2. Find each word in your dictionary or online dictionary. Time yourselves. How long did it take to find each word?

3. Check the meanings you have given, and extend your list.

### While-reading

4. Look at the following extract from an authentic text about refrigeration. Use the context to decide which meanings are used for the words in the list.

   *Another application for the technology is to milk additional energy from the hot waste water produced by conventional power plants. Even the most efficient plants today capture only 30 to 40 per cent of the energy in the fuel, releasing the bulk of the remainder in the form of heat – much of it is hot water, with sometimes damaging environmental consequences.*

### Post-reading

5. Do you notice any other words in this text that have several different meanings and functions? Which meanings are being used here?

6. Add all the words to your vocabulary notebook/computer folder. Can you add other members of each word family, using prefixes, suffixes or compound words?

7. Do any of the words in the text look similar to words in your own language? Are they ‘friends’ or ‘false friends’?

### Knowledge

- English core vocabulary consists of base or headwords, from which word families are constructed.
- Base words may have different, unrelated meanings (polysemy) – *bank*¹/bank², *bark*¹/bark².
- Derivatives are constructed by prefixes and suffixes.
- Base words can combine to form compounds.
- Words can change grammatical function through the addition of the ‘zero suffix’.
- Words can change meaning through figurative use (*crane*¹ = bird → *crane*² = lifting device).
- Words in the target language may sound or look like those in the mother tongue – these may be ‘friends’ or ‘false friends’.
- A monolingual dictionary contains many resources apart from spelling.

### Skills

- Using structural clues which determine parts of speech.
- Using morphological clues (prefixes, suffixes, compounding, etc) to determine meaning.
- Recognising and using definitions and glosses in a text.
- Inferencing meaning from a word’s context.
- Ignoring ‘throw-away’ words which are not important to the meaning of a text.
- Using ‘semantic approximation’ to determine the rough meaning of a word.
- Distinguishing between ‘friends’ or Anglicisms and ‘false friends’.
- Efficient dictionary use – being able to find any word within 15 seconds.

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![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3**

[Richard West](mailto:west46@btinternet.com) lectured at Manchester University, UK, for 20 years and is now a freelance ELT consultant, specialising in vocabulary, ESP and evaluation.

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Lost in translation?

Mike Groves asks what machine translation means for the future.

I have a free app on my phone that can do a job that was once the preserve of experts: it can translate for me. I can talk to it in English, and it will offer to translate what I say into one of many languages – from Albanian to Afrikaans to Welsh, Yiddish and Zulu. For some languages, it will even talk back to me in the language of my choice. What’s more, if I take a photograph of a piece of text, it can translate it into English for me. When I am on my laptop, I can put a web address into another website, and it will translate a whole page in its original context. This morning, I read a complicated and provocative Italian blog post, and I speak no Italian.

My translation app is by no means infallible: it does not recognise language perfectly, and does not always translate the message as intended. For now, it only deals with relatively short stretches of text, and is quite slow – it would be very frustrating to try to have a conversation through this medium for anything but the most limited topics. It also relies on a fast internet connection, rendering it useless if the mobile connection slows down.

However, I would like to make the case that this technology and others like it are about to revolutionise the language teaching profession, and that if we, as a professional community, are not ready for this, it might well leave us behind.

Assumptions

There are a few assumptions I want to make clear. The first is the assumption that this technology will get better: the voice and text recognition will get more accurate, the translation engine will improve, and the technology will be hosted on smaller and smaller devices. Secondly, I am assuming that the vast majority of people learning English are not doing it out of a love for the English language itself. Instead, they are learning English because they value the utility it gives them in a globalised world – the vast majority of people learning English are doing so because it allows them to work, travel and study internationally. The third assumption is that very many people prefer to do things that are easy and cheap. Although it might be better for us to spend a great deal of effort on something, we would very often prefer to take the easier path of least resistance.

Predictions

Let’s imagine a learner who is studying English for the purpose of travel. He wants to understand restaurant menus, speak to hotel receptionists and understand the signs around him when he travels to a foreign country. Most of this very basic interaction can be done through the use of a mobile phone app. What motivation does this learner have to spend money and go to an evening class twice a week for a couple of
Lost in translation?

months? Admittedly, he would not be able to take part in any natural conversation with local people on his holidays, but that level of competence can take years to develop with part-time evening classes.

Of course, our hypothetical learner is probably quite rare. People aspire to a greater level of competence than the most basic communication when they learn a language. This is where my first assumption comes in: this technology will get better. It is not hard to imagine an app that would link two phones: a user speaks into one, and a translation comes out of the other. With the advent of wearable technology, a translation could go into the user’s earpiece as someone else is speaking, or even onto the glasses they are wearing, something like subtitles.

It is my prediction that machine translation will allow people to converse in real time, even when they don’t share a language. Businesspeople will be able to negotiate contracts with each other, both by email and face to face, without ever having to go through the long and difficult process of studying English. Students will be able to listen to lectures in foreign universities, delivered by academics whose lectures are being simultaneously translated from another language.

Limitations

However, there are a number of things that this kind of technology cannot do. For example, I just said to my phone ‘Can I have a coffee?’, asking it to translate it into the Macedonian language. It understood my speech and came out with the equivalent of something like ‘Do I have the ability to possess coffee?’, which is the reason that my friends used to chuckle at me when I lived there and was starting to learn the language. Much more natural and appropriate would be to say ‘Give me a coffee’, abrupt as it sounds in English.

The above example is a slightly simplistic illustration of a much deeper problem. There are deeply-held cultural differences and, in its current state, machine translation is unable to come close to solving this problem. A mobile phone is unable to detect the difference in status between two speakers, and in many cultures this is a key piece of information when choosing between language items. The translation engine cannot understand that when English people say ‘That’s very interesting’, they are saying they do not like the thing in question – according, at least, to a recent internet meme.

There is a long list of things that we do when using language that machine translation is simply unable to do:

- It cannot negotiate intercultural considerations.
- It cannot understand social conventions and taboos.
- It cannot understand if the meaning carries emotion or tension.
- It cannot understand connotation or political sensitivities, sarcasm or embarrassment.
- It cannot see on an interlocutor’s face that the message has been confusing, amusing or enraging.

The ability to recognise speech and translate it into something meaningful in another language is an amazing technological achievement, but it still lacks these key abilities to negotiate the never-ending complexities of human interaction and communication.

Implications

So what does this mean for language teachers? Will we be out of a job, replaced by a machine? The answer is probably no, but we will have to deal with a large amount of change.

There are certain things that we teach now which will lose their importance as machine translation takes on a more central role. For example, I believe that the need to learn large amounts of vocabulary will be reduced. We will be able to use our phones to get instantly translations of words we don’t have at our fingertips.

In addition, grammar rules will take a backseat. Why would we need to remember the complexities of the third conditional when a computer program can do it for us? Why would we need reading skills in a foreign language if we can just put a text through a translation engine?

The role of the teacher will change. We will no longer be obliged to explain the rules of the past participle, and how it forms the passive. The technology will do all that. However, the teacher will need to explain the deeper meaning of the passive – the fact that using passive forms often distances the speaker from the verb, leading to a certain perlocutionary force. I believe that the teaching of languages will become more akin to the teaching of intercultural competence. We will no longer need to teach the surface level of communication. However, crucially, the deeper, more complex factors will remain.

There is also the issue of trust in the technology. As the 2010 flash crash on Wall Street showed, when too much trust is placed in technology, the consequences can be dramatic. Would businesspeople be happy to trust a computer to negotiate for them, without having any idea of what is being said? I believe that users will want to be able to understand what is coming out on their behalf, without necessarily having the skill to create the intricacies of the language themselves.

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Mike Groves has been teaching English since the early 1990s in places as diverse as Bosnia, Malaysia and the UK. He is currently working at the University of Bath, UK.

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Five things you always wanted to know about technology and young learners
(but were too afraid to ask)

1 Young learners and technology? Surely kids already know more about technology than I do!
We’ve all heard apocryphal stories (and even watched the YouTube videos) of 12-month-old babies using iPads, and often heard the sentiment that ‘young people are good with technology’ expressed by parents and teachers. The myth of the ‘digital native’ (those who are born in the age of technology and are therefore supposedly ‘good’ with it) and the ‘digital immigrant’ (those who came to technology later in life and are therefore less confident with it) is alive and well. However, it is exactly that – a myth. There are plenty of young people out there who may be confident with technology, but are not particularly savvy users. And equally, there are plenty of older people who are proficient users of technology. The terms digital native and digital immigrant were coined by Marc Prensky back in 2001 and, at the time, they seemed to capture a certain zeitgeist. But they are questionable terms to use these days.

2 If youngsters are not ‘digital natives’, then what are they?
In my view, flexible terms like David White’s digital residents and digital visitors are more appropriate, and less age-biased. Digital residents are those who ‘live’ online and have regular social interactions online and an established digital presence. Digital visitors, on the other hand, go online only now and again for specific tasks, such as to buy a book or to send an email. Most of us use technology to some extent these days, whatever age we are.

3 What does this mean for teachers of young learners?
The myth of the digital ‘native’ versus ‘immigrant’ means that teachers often feel they have nothing to teach their students about technology. They often expect their students automatically to be skilled at using technology appropriately. This is simply not the case. Try showing your teenage students a spoof website, such as the one describing the Pacific Northwest tree octopus, and see what reaction you get. Teenagers will often believe everything they read online. In this case, we, as adults with more developed critical thinking skills, can show our students how to assess the validity and provenance of information on the web. If you’d like to try out a tree octopus lesson with learners aged about 14+, you’ll find a detailed lesson plan at http://goo.gl/88YlqN.

We need to help younger learners understand essential issues such as how to stay safe online (e-safety), how to search safely, and what sort of behaviour is appropriate (and inappropriate) on social networks such as Facebook. We need to make them aware of cyberbullying and how to confront it. We need to help them become responsible citizens in an increasingly online world. All these examples are essential digital literacy skills that can be integrated into our language classes if and when we use technology.

4 Can you give me some examples of how to work with young learners and technology?
How you use technology with your young learners depends on their ages.

- Very young learners are still developing fine motor skills such as drawing or learning to write, and there are ways that certain technologies (such as touch-screen tablet apps) can help with this.
- Pre-teens can learn to search for and evaluate information on the web (see the tree octopus example mentioned above), or create multimedia work with images and videos. You can find a simple activity which involves getting your students to create their own version of the ‘Carry on’ meme at http://goo.gl/m4ps0O.

- Older teens can discuss appropriate and inappropriate behaviour on social networks, using discussion prompts such as those available at http://goo.gl/88YlqN. Or you can get them reading QR codes, as a springboard for integrated skills work – see http://goo.gl/xutCag for a lesson plan.

5 Do I have to use technology with my young learners?
Probably the most important point to make is that any use of technology needs to be integrated into your lessons, and it needs to support your language aims. There is clearly no point in using technology for technology’s sake. Unless it enhances the lesson in some way, don’t use it. There is still an important place for pen and paper, and for physical movement, in the young learner classroom. Technology should not take preference over these essential elements. One can teach (and, most importantly, students can learn) perfectly well without having the latest gadgets in the classroom. It’s not about the technology – it’s about the teaching and the learning!

In this series, Nicky Hockly explains aspects of technology which some people may be embarrassed to confess that they don’t really understand. In this article, she discusses using technology with children.

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nicky.hockly@theconsultants-e.com
I have been meaning to write about Padlet for ages. This tool used to be called Wallwisher, and I featured it in ETp Issues 69 and 88. Recent updates, however, have made a huge difference to it, making it more accessible, more versatile and giving it lots of additional security features.

What is Padlet?

Padlet is basically an electronic corkboard that allows you to pin up anything onto the screen. So students and teachers can add comments, documents, videos, pictures and web links onto the board, and anyone who visits the board can access this content. The electronic corkboard is referred to as a ‘wall’ on Padlet.

It is ideal, then, for discussions and brainstorming. For example, a teacher could create a wall with a specific question for the students to answer. They could then access the board and add their responses. I have often used it for initial discussions about technology. So, for instance, I might create a wall and ask my students to answer the question ‘What are the advantages of using technology in our teaching and learning?’. They can access the board during the lesson or at home, add their answers and see what the other students in the class have written. In this example, I am only asking the students to write up their comments, not to add documents, video files, etc. You can see a simple wall at http://padlet.com/russellstannard/why. Padlet works really well for project work. If, for example, you have a group of students who are looking at ways to reduce carbon emissions, they can create a wall and work together to add different links, videos, articles, etc related to that topic. They can then use the information to write an essay or report – or you could ask each group to present their electronic corkboard to the rest of the class. At the heart of everything in Padlet is the idea of collaboration and sharing.

Why Padlet?

There are hundreds of tools and technologies that allow students to share material and collaborate. What I like about Padlet are the following features:

- The teacher can monitor the contributions from the students. The settings can be configured so that the teacher has to read and accept any contributions from students before they can be published.

- All corkboards can have a password. This can be used to control who views, creates and edits the corkboard. These security features are not available in all sharing/collaborative tools.

- Padlet quickly allows you to make a personalised address for your wall. When you first create a new wall, you are given an access address with lots of numbers and letters. However, you can change it to your own address, making it easier to remember and for the students to access.

- Walls from Padlet can be easily embedded into blogs, websites and virtual learning environments.

- Padlet has apps for use on tablets, too.

Limitations

There are, however, a number of limitations with Padlet. The key one is that the screen size is quite small, and very quickly, the content added to the wall can cause it to become cumbersome and hard to view. You can scroll up and down but, even so, it can be awkward to view content. If I ever use a Padlet wall for the whole class, I tend to ask the students only to write on the wall and not add pictures, videos links, etc, which take up a lot of space. Padlet is best used with groups of four to five students or fewer, especially if you want them to add video, pictures and links.

Tips

Here are a couple of tips, based on my own experience of using Padlet:

- Students often add content to the wall without really thinking about what they have found. They will often add links to video content without watching the video and deciding if it is valid. So I always ask my students to add a note next to each video, explaining why they have added this video to the wall and what they like about it. I do the same with any web links or articles they share. This way, at least we know that the students have read the article or watched the video. This tends to encourage them to be a little more careful about what they share.

- I also suggest that you add an ‘editing’ stage into the creation of any walls produced by the students. So, for example, if the students have worked on a project about Catherine the Great, it is quite likely there will be a lot of content, including videos, pictures, links and articles. Put the students together in their groups and tell them to work together to choose the best two articles, the best two videos, etc. They should keep these and delete the rest. Some of the students can then present their wall to the rest of the class.

You can find help for Padlet at www.teachertrainingvideos.com/e-portfolios-iwbs/how-to-use-padlet.html.

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

Keep sending your favourite sites to Russell: russellstannard@btinternet.com
Find the words hidden in the photos and identify the common theme.

Hint: photos that are joined together are part of the same word; complete words are separated by a space.

Can you puzzle it out?
The answers are on page 16.

(This idea is taken from The Independent newspaper’s ‘Get the picture’ column.)
Adaptive learning in practice

New date confirmed
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Explaining the challenges, benefits and future of adaptive learning, this one-day event will give you the opportunity to:

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- Learn how to blend LMS learning with face-to-face learning
- Question how adaptive learning will shape the future of ELT.

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- Anna Kolbuszewska
- Cleve Miller
- Laurie Harrison
- Nick Robinson
- Jo Sayers
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