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EDITORIAL



Alex Monk
Advertising



Andrew G Scott
Editor



Ania Ciesla
IHJ Administrator & Subscriptions

Welcome to Issue 22! We hope that there is something for everyone in this issue, whatever you do and wherever your interests lie, whether you teach here in Australia or Azerbaijan. The articles range from the language classroom to the growing influence of technology, from teaching overseas to IH London's historic move.

The IH Journal endeavours to appeal to all those involved in language learning and teaching. There are contributions from newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers, non-native speaker teachers and teachers of other languages, Directors of Studies and teacher trainers. I would like to thank all those who spent time and effort writing for Issue 22. Your hard work is greatly appreciated. Also, a very large thank you to Ian Berry, Ania Ciesla and everyone at IHWO, whose continuing patience and support have been invaluable.

In an effort to ensure that the IH Journal is relevant and interesting to its readership and to encourage comment and discussion, we have introduced a 'Letters to the Editor' section. Well done to Mark Lowe for writing the first email to be published! Please email your thoughts and comments on articles, language teaching and any issues concerning International House to ihjeditor@ihworld.co.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Andrew G Scott – Editor
IH Cairns

Letters to the Editor

Here are two ideas for others to write about:

1. Since our new editor is based in Australia, why not produce an appreciation of the contribution of Michael Halliday to our field? As you will know, he is now Emeritus Professor at Sydney University and one of the most (if not THE most) original, interesting and seminal thinkers in language studies of our time. I am a great admirer of his work, including the more popular books like 'Language as Social Semiotic' and 'Learning How to Mean' as well as the tough classic 'Introduction to Functional Grammar'. I wish more people in our field read and enjoyed Halliday's work. It would be a valuable service to our readers to tell them more about his ideas, I feel.
2. More 'What I did before becoming an EFL teacher' articles. The pieces published so far have been fascinating and instructive, and I for one would love to read more of these.

I hope these ideas are of some interest and I look forward very much to seeing your first issue.

Mark Lowe
DoS, IH Tbilisi

ARTICLES

GOODBYE PICCADILLY, FAREWELL 106

Brita Haycraft

A year or so ago, I was in a group visiting the V&A British rooms when the guide proudly showed us into an 18th century room, all white with an ornate ceiling in gold, designed by Robert Adam. As I was admiring it, it struck me that 'our' Adam room at International House in 106 Piccadilly was in fact more beautiful. I asked the organiser of the V&A visit if she would like to see our Adam room, rooms in fact, indeed the whole building. She and an architect friend came along and were both astounded and delighted that such a fine building with its original layout and décor could still be found in a fine London street, not as a museum but an actual working place.

This elegant house was built in 1761 opposite Green Park, an arrow's shot from the King's new Buckingham Palace and in 1764 the Earl of Coventry moved in. The street in front, or dusty highway rather, was already known as Piccadilly, as it led up to Piccadilly Hall but had previously been called Portugal Street honouring Charles II's Queen Catherine of Braganza. After Cromwell's death and the restoration of the monarchy, widespread building started and by the mid 1700s Piccadilly was becoming a street of 'palaces' close to the royal court.

Coventry House is a fine example of well-proportioned Palladian features, the architectural taste in the 18th century inspired by the 16th century Venetian Antonio Palladio. It stood in its own grounds, as did the other 'palaces' along Piccadilly, like Piccadilly Hall, still there in 1819 when it came down to make room for the new Piccadilly Circus and Regent Street. There was still much open land with countryside not far away. Today only Haymarket recalls those rural days.

To enter Coventry House, you would walk up the stone steps, then as now, or take the steps down to the basement, delivering baskets for the kitchens. A gravel front with potted trees might have spread along the front, with some formal gardens laid out. Already at the side was Brick Street, a muddy pathway to some old brick works and Coventry House horses and carriages and carts would have added to the mud, passing to the stable yard behind.

Horsemen would have traversed Piccadilly from Green Park without railings after hunts there or visits to Buckingham Palace. Ladies in ample skirts and dainty slippers would have been carried across in special chairs. Under today's street pavement there remain four old vaults, which might have led into a secret tunnel linking Coventry House, underneath Green Park, with Buckingham Palace.

Coventry House was built on five floors, including its basement, in a perfect square shape. Inside, an ample lobby had doors into a long room reaching along the whole front. Ahead lay the large Hall, the length of the whole building, with ornate stairs up to the first floor. The upper floors and the basement, however, could only be reached by the separate stairwell at the side, as in medieval chateaux. At the bottom of the winding stairs one notices a sturdy door into the old washroom, with its exceptionally fine flagstone floor.

Standing on the ground floor, you face a splendid door beyond the grand stairs. This would have opened out to the stable yard behind as that was the entire house at first. The



existing corridor and large rooms and stained glass windows came a hundred years later. Thus Coventry House was not a large house. It was the town house for Lord and Lady Coventry and their two young children when arriving from their country seat.

The Earl wished Robert Adam to adapt the interior and Adam, already famous, submitted some grand designs, still kept in the Soane Museum archives, bills and all. However, the cost exceeded what Coventry was prepared to spend, so Robert Adam devoted all his attention to the first floor with its two square rooms, large rectangular room and small octagonal room – the much loved C1, C2, C3 and C4 in IH parlance. Adam called the large rooms 'the three rooms' and the largest the 'Great Room'.

The Ante-room was the first room, left at the top of the stairs, and Adam kept it more restrained and harmonious, with circles on the ceiling, on the friezes and on the chimney piece. Still, its walls were hung with crimson silk damask and matching festoon curtains, and its dados were painted in green, the skirtings in rose-colour with the carved friezes round the walls also in green, picked out in gold! Crinkly mirrors on the walls in the French manner amplified the reflections from daylight and from candelabra, making the rooms dazzle and seem even larger. Visitors would wait here before being received into the Great Room.

The Great Room was decorated magnificently by Adam. He filled its ceiling with ovals in rectangular panels and borders of cameos and roundels, planting Aurora in the middle and had the sought-after Antonio Zucchi paint in his motifs in these spaces, while the scenes in the roundels at each corner of the ceiling were done by his equally renowned wife Angelika Kaufmann.

We must imagine it with a carpet designed to match the splendid ceiling, as were the escagliola tops of two eight-legged tables placed either side of the doors to the Ante Room. Adam's fireplace was flanked by two large ornate



sofas with matching armchairs, gilt in the antique manner. Chandeliers and wall lights would shine and dazzle in distorting mirrors. The windows all along the front looked out over Green Park but did not reach to the floor then. There was no balcony until the mid 1800s.

From the Great Room a far door, a double door, led to the third large room, the Countess's bedroom. This bedroom was primarily for show, the tradition in great houses, and an extension was proposed with a private apartment for the Countess but never materialised. Less extravagant than the Great Room, it would have looked down on the stables and the brick works through its large windows, no doubt behind rich curtains. Apparently an enormous clothes press was ordered for this bedroom, but turned out to be too bulky, so Adam simply had it cut in two, and placed them outside on the landing. This may account for the oddly shaped mahogany cupboards by those pillars today, convenient spaces for IH handouts, with glasses and bottles stored inside.

Across the landing from the Great Room, beyond the far pillar and large mahogany cupboard, is a fourth splendid door. You walk into a small room, octagonal in shape, and you behold the jewel of the house.

The experts consider that Adam succeeded in giving these conventional rectangular and square spaces novelty, variety and many contrasts, following the preferred style which evoked the spirit of the ancients, vaguely reminiscent of interiors of Pompeii villas. Today this Great Room may be the finest remaining in London.

Across the landing from the Great Room beyond the far pillar and large mahogany cupboard, is a fourth splendid door. You walk into a small room, octagonal in shape, and you behold the jewel of the house. This was the Countess's Boudoir, with its discreet little passage through to her bedroom. Here Adam lavished his design and each wall, the ceiling, even the floor, was embellished with small-scale ornaments in the 'antique style'. Scrolled foliage and winged griffons issued from pilasters, pedestals, panels and adorned Greek friezes, mingling with baroque cherubs and garlands, all painted 'best dead white' and picked in rose and green, then gilded. Adam also designed a fireplace to be richly carved.

The Coventry family lived here for a period and thrived, one hopes. Great dinners would be served in the long room on the ground floor looking across to Green Park, perhaps spied by the Coventry children from the stairs before ushered by servants to their nurseries upstairs, who themselves slept in the attic rooms with their superb views towards Buckingham Palace!

Come the 19th century and at some point Coventry House became the residence of Napoleon III's Ambassador to Queen Victoria, the Comte de Flahut, Talleyrand's illegitimate son. The staircase to the first floor had been replaced in 1832, built by Cundy. No drawing or description of the no doubt stately original one survives.

What is known is that in 1862 the St James's Club acquired the building, and caused many changes. A rear extension was added, with more substantial rooms and novelties like running water and water closets. A mezzanine floor was built off the servants' stairwell and a large elegant Regency room created.

The Ante-room became the members' reading room, the Great Room their dining-room and the Countess's bedroom their bar. But the Octagonal Room alas, suffered a terrible fate. The St James's Club had no qualms about turning it into a pantry, installing a dumbwaiter in the secret passageway to hoist food and drink from the cellar kitchens up to the Club bar and dining-room. Its Adam fireplace was ripped out to make room for a new window and was demoted to the ground floor at the far end of the large hall, where it still stands almost forgotten, the only genuine Adam fireplace still in the building.

As more and more buildings sprang up along Piccadilly, Coventry House would see a huge building rise across the narrow Brick Street. And at the turn of the century the Park Lane Hotel shot up to tower over Coventry House on the other side, the fine Palladian-style house now crammed in, as seen today. The stable yard had been built over. One wonders where the horses and carriages sheltered. Perhaps down an alleyway later named Yarmouth Place.

The St. James's club remained in Coventry House for over a century. In 1976 John Haycraft spotted the press notice in the Guardian that the club had run out of funds and was moving out. He approached them. With his International House in Shaftesbury Avenue since 1961, bursting with students and teacher trainees in ninety rooms but with no large rooms, John



The St James's Club remained in Coventry House for over a century.

In 1976 John Haycraft spotted the press notice in the Guardian that the club had run out of funds and was moving out

set his heart on the Piccadilly house. Its rent was very low as it could only be leased to a cultural or educational body. It took nine months for John to persuade the owners that IH made suitable tenants.

When IH moved in nothing could be altered, nor did we wish to. The entrance, still with its original glass lamp, was the obvious Reception area and the long room facing the park became the Library. The spacious hall somehow got the name Exhibition Area, while a small room at its side, octagonal like the exquisite room above, was the ideal place for our Bookshop. The corridor to the rear led to teacher training classrooms and the room with the splendid glass cupola, the St James's Club billiard room, became the main staffroom. At the end, past the William Morris windows, the two butlers' bedrooms changed into areas for teachers' lesson preparations, one for smokers and one for non-smokers. At lunchtime the curved Osbert Lancaster bar was crowded out with staff and students.

It was always awesome to climb the amazing staircase to teach in the grand rooms on the first floor where teacher training took place, needing space for trainees, volunteer students, onlookers, tape recorders, OHPs, whiteboards, visual aids and the tutor. Many an EFL idea was hatched under those Adam ceilings.

The two upper floors saw classrooms fitted into the former servants' rooms, while nursery rooms and laundry rooms become offices for Accounts, Affiliated Schools and the

Director General. Outside the windows, the Green Park giant trees were bowing. The cellars turned into a restaurant and video rooms, the wine vaults becoming language laboratories, while storage rooms just had to fit in as best they could.

In the early 80s the painted ceiling of the Great Room, stained from 100 years of cigar smoking club members (Lord Lucan, Harold Macmillan a.o.) needed cleaning. Scaffolding was erected and for four months an English Heritage specialist lay there, Michaelangelo-wise, restoring the lovely ceiling. Needless to say, IH teaching and social activities went on underneath as normal.

As for the unique Octagonal Room on the first floor, we could but line it with a loose octagonal partition and leave its exquisite décor covered by grime from years of bacon frying for St James's breakfasts. Had it been preserved, the most exquisite Adam room in London would have drawn visitors and art connoisseurs today, out of reach for teaching colleges like International House.

Sources: The London Encyclopedia; Eileen Harris 'The Genius of Robert Adam'; John Haycraft 'Adventures of a Language Traveller';

Jeremy Page '06 Piccadilly', the 'IH at 50' Brochure 2003

Brita Haycraft and her husband John founded International House in Cordoba, Spain in 1953. Back in London in 1959, after a year and a half modestly in Endell Street in Covent Garden, they found 40 Shaftesbury Avenue, where IH flourished but on a half yearly lease only. It was renewed every year until 1977 when John spotted a whole, historical, building with a 19-year lease at 106 Piccadilly! IH thrived there for 30 years. With the freehold never on offer, however, it was time to find a place IH could own.



A Teacher and A Rock & Roller

Julio Martínez Miranda

I was born in Mexico City in 1963. When I was five years old I began to take English lessons in Grammar School. In total, I have been studying this language for thirty nine years and I still cannot say that I have reached the level of a native speaker. This is probably because, although I have travelled a little in my life, I have never lived in an English-speaking country.

In 1989, that was eighteen years ago, I obtained the Certificate of Proficiency in English (C.P.E.), which is awarded by the University of Cambridge, in England. I got a "B" in that exam. I have been working as an English teacher since 1985 and, in June, 2007, I will have completed twenty two years in this career.

In 1982, I graduated from high school and I decided that I had to develop my English skills further and I attended advanced classes at a British institute in Mexico City. Three years later, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper targeted at people who spoke fluent English and who would like to become English teachers. I thought this was something I could do to earn some money. After a two-week training course, I gained the opportunity to start teaching. I cashed my first cheque as a teacher on June 30th, 1985.

In 1987, I obtained my Certificate of Proficiency in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, and I was hired by the same institute where I was being trained before I finished the course.

They told me I had a lot of potential. From the moment I started teaching, I have had a wonderful time, and I have met hundreds of people who have enriched my life. I have been learning more and more English with each course I teach and, as if that were not enough, I am sure I have learned from my students, in all their different fields and ages, more than what I have taught them.

Lately, I have been looking back at my life, and I have seen many positive decisions, actions, and events. Not everything has happened as it should have. Some things went wrong but most things have produced good results. I worked for International House Mexico the first time in 1998, and I have been working there since June 2002

I have gone through a lot of different training courses, but now I have been thinking of the possibility of taking an online teaching course this year which would possibly give me the opportunity to work from my own home and stop travelling all around Mexico City for company classes. Perhaps I could even get the chance of becoming an international English teacher who can teach in any country of the world using my computer. I do not know exactly where the road will lead me, but I know that in my profession I have enjoyed every step of the way. And most likely this has also been possible because I have always had my guitar by my side during all these years.

Before I started teaching, life seemed a little different and I had other interests, just like any other young man in my country. I was always a good student at school with good marks and, when I turned twelve, I asked my mother to buy me an acoustic guitar as a birthday present. One of my neighbours used to play blues solos quite well and he could play the chord sequences of a blues, or a rock & roll song, impeccably. He taught me my first chords and I started singing ballads in Spanish and blues songs in English. It was at that time that I got to know bands like Chicago, John Mayall, Black Sabbath, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Hendrix, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd, and Yes. This guy was at least ten years older than me, but his younger brother Luis and I took after the older generation. These older generation guys, the guitarist and friends, must have been twelve by the time The Beatles started becoming a success in 1964. So, they had lived all those years of the start of rock music as a world phenomenon. They experienced rock & roll, dancing to Bill Haley's hits like 'Rock Around the Clock' and 'See you Later Alligator'. 'Long Tall Sally' and 'Jailhouse Rock' could be heard everywhere in those years, too.

But that was almost gone in my time. I am a post-hippies melomaniac, that is someone who has a strong predilection for music, a lover of music, especially rock music. When I was eight years old, in 1971, I remember my mother driving my sister and I to

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school. We used to turn on the radio to listen to a Beatles programme and both her and I used to sing their songs. We did not know a lot of English then, but we used to try to pronounce the lyrics of the songs as closely as possible. Because we loved the Beatles' melodies, we did not care if we were not being accurate. We had a great time on our way to school and on our way back home. This later taught me that imitation and repetition can help you to learn English or any other language even if you do not know exactly what you are saying. I think if you repeat something as closely as possible to the original and then you listen to what you are saying, and you repeat it again, you can get to understand it and gain insight of the whole message, with or without the help of a teacher. We used to sing like this not only to the Beatles songs but also all the other radio hits of the time.

I was still eight years old or so when I first went into a record shop to buy my first record, a 33 1/3 R.P.M. (Revolutions Per Minute) EP (Extended Play) record. I remember asking the attendant to show me something that was a rock hit and that was the latest thing available. I heard the song through a set of headphones and I was amazed and excited about the music and the singing style. At the time, I could not understand a single word

of the lyrics, but I loved the music and bought the record. It was Paul McCartney's song 'Monk Berry Moon Delight', translated into Spanish as 'The Monk'. I remember that I used to sing 'Monkberry moon the light'. Years later, I learned the word 'delight'. Today I can understand almost the complete lyrics of the song.

When I was twelve, I bought my first LP (Long Play) record: 'Masque', by Kansas. The shop attendant, with the looks of a real hippie, recommended it to me. Since it was the imported edition, it contained the lyrics printed on the inside sleeve. It was then that I first said: "Wow, so this is state of the art rock music. Wow." It was 1975. I memorized the lyrics and melodies and today I can sing the whole record by heart. It is my favourite album in the history of rock music, and Kansas is one of my three favourite bands.

Later, I got to know Bob Dylan's lyrics and I discovered poetry in music. I learned that a poem has its own rhythm when you read it and that it contains a melody within. This is how I discovered music within the words of my own writings. So, I started making songs when I was eighteen years old.

Today, I am still writing songs in Spanish and making versions of them in English with the same music. On a radio station contest I was once given second place for a version in Spanish of Pink Floyd's song 'Wish You Were Here', and I heard it broadcast nation-wide. That was the prize. A Mexican band, with a completely arranged version in English, won the first prize, which was an electric guitar and a professional recording.

When I was thirteen, I started taking classical guitar lessons which later helped me to play the bass guitar in a high school contest in which we won the first place with Diana Ross's 'Touch Me in the Morning'. Before even thinking of the idea of teaching English, I had already faced a three-hundred-person audience. I had been able to stand successfully in front of a big group of people. I lost stage fright forever and this made me feel at home when I had to face my first group as an English Teacher. Later, I

The perfect diction that you need to sing a song and be understood by an audience is the same perfect diction that I always try to teach my students. The real speed and fluency of the language as well is my concern when teaching

joined a Mexican band called Nirvana. This band existed and disappeared many years before Kurt Cobain's famous 'Nirvana' became known all over the world. While I was in that band, as the bass player and lead singer (we used to compose and sing in English), we gave at least twelve concerts in different forums, played in a restaurant-bar on Fridays and Saturdays, and once we were interviewed on a renown cultural radio station in Mexico City. All this experience has given me self-assurance when speaking in public. So, I do not care if I have to teach English or Spanish, for I am also a Certified Spanish Teacher, to one student or to fifty students at the same time. I have even taught three different lessons to three different small groups with three different English levels at the same time and in the same classroom.

The perfect diction that you need to sing a song and be understood by an audience is the same perfect diction that I always try to teach my students. The real speed and fluency of the language as well is my concern when teaching. Many of my techniques for improving my students' speaking and listening skills come from my experience with rock music. And today I still have the dream of recording professionally and selling my first compact disc with my own original songs.

I have been to many places, met a lot of people, done a lot of stuff. I once or twice tried to become an engineer, but too many parties and having to work at the same time as I studied made me fail. If asked why I am a teacher, I would probably say: 'I am a language teacher because I had no other choice'. This is probably true. Life

is what it is. And God's will is what exists. The paradox lies in the fact that I have been happy doing something that I sometimes hate doing. Maybe I should be playing with a famous band. Perhaps it is not too late for that. God only knows. If you could listen to track 7 in Bruce Springsteen's 1984 CD 'Born In The U.S.A.', the song entitled 'No Surrender', you could maybe feel how I sometimes feel about music. But pressed to think a little deeper, I am sure now that I have made a difference for hundreds of students I have had. That makes me happy. To know that in spite of any drawbacks I could think of, in all these years, in all this life, I have succeeded in giving a satisfactory service to people as a teacher.



ih *Julio Martínez Miranda was born in Mexico City in 1963. He started studying English when he was five years old, and started teaching it in 1985. He is currently working as an English and Spanish Teacher at IH Mexico. He likes writing and music.*

A Breath of Fresh Air (Utilising 2nd Career Teachers)

Stacey Newport

From an administrative point of view, second career teachers are both a blessing and curse to language teacher staffing plans. Today, overlooking the headaches of unfamiliarity to teaching methods and materials, inexperience in the classroom and the generally older age of teachers who have had another career prior to entering the profession, we will concentrate on how these teachers can bring new life into the teaching approaches at your centre.

Unlike many new career teachers who may come straight from university and/or certification programs, second career teachers may come from previously successful careers in a different sector with the life experience that normally accompanies a second career choice. These added job skills and life experience can add valuable aspects to your teaching repertoire, as we will discuss in this article.

A second career teacher will often come to teaching with some level of dissatisfaction with the other career. Perhaps this person chose teaching after having attained the satisfaction of having got to a certain level in one career and decided to look for challenges in a new one. Second career teachers come to teaching with a certain level of experience in the first career field. Since these teachers have chosen to change to the field of education it is not helpful to try to make teaching too similar to the previous experience.

On the other hand the teacher will have some familiarity with the other set of job skills and may feel comfortable operating in that realm as a sort of comfort zone. It is in the best interest of the language center to allow and even encourage, as the teacher expresses interest, the use of previous job skills to enrich language teaching. Teachers must be considered according to their individual needs, but it is sometimes the case that job satisfaction is enhanced if the teacher is utilized both inside and outside the

classroom. There are many activities outside the classroom such as extra-curricular event planning, marketing, in-service, quality control, curriculum evaluation and other such activities that may interest second career teachers.

Let's think about Lyn who spent 25 years as an executive secretary. When she retired she pursued extra training and is a new teacher at your school. Lyn brings many job skills such as telephoning, scheduling, and people management that may be helpful at your facility. She doesn't want to become a secretary again but she may be helpful in some administrative aspects as well as her assigned teaching duties. It might be more efficient to have her plan the event calendar than a new teacher who may be learning the ropes of scheduling efficiency.

Perhaps Nathan comes to teaching from a background as a translator. He may be learning and growing in techniques for classroom management but he knows how he learned languages best and can use this rich knowledge to enhance how he develops his teaching style. He may be able to help other teachers who are stuck in this-is-the-way-we-always-do-it ruts.

Think about William who is trained as a doctor and finds himself teaching English in a place where his doctoring skills are perceived as less valuable than his ability to teach English as a native speaker. William not only has knowledge of medical and scientific vocabulary but also has been learning to problem solve, set goals and motivate people to take ownership of their lives and plans.

Sports enthusiasts are great for organizing outside events, team activities, and creating enthusiasm for special times like camps or concerts. Housewives that stayed home to raise children may be thought to not have special skills but if you think about their first hand understanding of children and even the wealth of young learner books, songs and activities their unique contribution should not be overlooked.

One might ask: "So how will our school use the skills that each employee brings?" To do this we can:

1. Ask employees what they like to do.
2. Develop a checklist that identifies strengths/weaknesses/interests.
3. Look at the jobs to be done and take the time to match them to people's unique skills.
4. Don't be afraid to put a person who would not "normally" do a certain task in a trial position of that task if they are interested and able.
5. Re-evaluate teacher satisfaction and look "outside the box" to improve how people view their job(s).

6. Consider that second career teachers may have left a higher paying career to begin as a teacher and will appreciate added responsibility and remuneration.
7. Provide regular Performance Development Reviews, which evaluate past performance and give direction to future work.

No matter what method is used as the members of your teaching staff are engaged in teaching at your organization, the goal is always to provide the best, most efficient and most competent teaching to reach the goals put forth by students, corporate representatives and the staff of your institution. We all want to breathe fresh air!

Stacy Newport is a second career teacher with a background in health care. She works at Apollo Education & Training IH Vietnam, an organization that has a healthy balance of teaching professionals. Apollo is better at being able to use extra skills than the other schools in which she has worked. She uses her mothering skills with children, her organizational skills with extra curricular events and her medical goal setting for programme creation, evaluation and improvement. She collaborated on this article with her colleague Paula Hanna who came to teaching as a second career following a successful career in publishing.



Online Teacher Training

Roger Hunt

We buy everything online these days from aeroplane tickets, holidays in the sun and old copies of our favourite childhood books (or I do at least). So, why not get educated online as well? That's what I thought when I decided to write some online teacher training courses. Why online rather than face to face you might ask. Well, for a start, attending a face-to-face course can be very costly: course fees, accommodation, flights perhaps, living expenses etc. can all add up to quite a whack. Also you may have to get time off work to attend the course and that can be difficult if course dates don't fit in with your holiday dates (and even if they do who wants to give up that holiday in the sun you bought cheaply online?)

Some people worry about things online because they think you have to be a computer buff to even get started but this is not so. IH Barcelona's courses use the Moodle platform, which is incredibly simple to use; I mastered how to create courses on it in about twenty minutes and I'm definitely not a computer buff. Doing a course on it as a student is even easier and it is impossible to wreck anything other than with a brick or similar heavy blunt object. So, if you can get to our website, you have the computer skills needed to take our courses.

So, what are these courses and how do they work? I imagine this might be a question you'd like to ask about now so here's my answer. The courses are intended for teachers who have little knowledge of the course topic. We have courses on the Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), Teaching and Learning Vocabulary, Language Analysis for Teachers, Implementing the Common European Framework (CEF), Teaching Younger Learners, Teaching writing skills and a Foundation course in TEFL for those considering ELT as a profession, but who are unsure as to whether or not they want to commit to an accredited pre-service course at the moment. And we are developing more!

Each course is divided into modules each of which concerns a sub-topic of the course. In each module there is a short background text on the topic, then materials and tasks for teachers to experiment with in the classroom. After this experimentation teachers post their results, queries and concerns on the module forum which is similar to a blog: you can access it at any time you like, read what your fellow course participants have written there and add your own comments. One of our tutors is also in the forum discussion to sort out problems, respond to questions, keep people on their toes and generally have a very sociable time with people from all over the world who are sharing their ideas with each other. We've had

An online TT course means you can work in the leisure of your own home with some nice music and a drink in your hand at three in the morning if you want

An online TT course means you can work in the leisure of your own home with some nice music and a drink in your hand at three in the morning if you want.

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Another question you might have is 'How much time will I need to commit to a course?' About two hours a week is the answer - except for the fact that you can spend as many classroom hours experimenting with the materials and ideas as you want of course. The courses run for eight weeks usually (the TKT course is longer at fifteen weeks) and we run them year round so no need to give up that holiday though you can if you want!

I realise this little article looks like a blatant ad for our courses, but it's not. It's just that this is a new IH initiative and we are proud of it!

We are getting fantastic feedback from course participants but none of them so far work for IH schools. So, go and nag the person with the purse strings and tell him or her that we charge 95 euros (TKT 195 euros) and that's not a bad price. It's cheap, but the quality is good - at least that's what the feedback tells us so far.

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For more information please have a look at our website: <http://www.ihes.com/bcn/tt/online.html>

 **Roger Hunt is Director of Education at IH Barcelona where he is responsible for educational development in both teaching and teacher training. He has worked in ELT for 27 years in many parts of the world and is currently mostly involved in writing and tutoring on the IH Barcelona online teacher training courses.**



Developing Oral Proficiency Through Extensive Reading

Thomas Baker

Introduction

Six years ago, in May, 2001, I taught my first English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class (an intermediate level course) at Instituto Chileno Norte Americano de Cultura, which is a bi-national center in Santiago, Chile. Like any novice teacher, I followed the text book religiously. I soon realized, however, that my students' development of oral proficiency was not being addressed adequately by the text book. In this article, I share how I came to use extensive reading to address this shortcoming.

What could I do to help them?

First, I reflected on the course up to that point. The students were enthusiastic and participated actively in all activities, even doing the assigned homework. They delighted in teaching me new meanings for words I knew in Spanish. For example, they had taught me that a "sapo" isn't only a frog, but also an unusual occupation in Chile. They had danced "cueca", the national dance of Chile, and been pleased as punch when I just about made a hole in the floor trying to emulate the intricate foot steps and jumps.

They had also recommended an excellent comic book for me to read, "Condorito." (www.condorito.cl) (I still read it.) One student, Rodrigo Ayala, had given me a copy of Isabel Allende's book, "La Casa de los Espiritus" (The House of Spirits) after he discovered that I actually could read Spanish much better than I could speak it. They often talked to me about what I was reading both before and after class. It was through their efforts and these two printed materials that Chilean culture was slowly beginning to make sense to me.

One day the answer to my question about what I could do to help improve their oral proficiency came to me like a bolt of lightning. I was reading in Spanish but my students weren't reading in English! They were naturally talking to me about the book I was reading. We had talked about the author, the plot, the characters, the setting, my opinion of the book, etc. If they had been reading in English, we could have been doing the same thing, but as a class speaking activity!

One student, had given me a copy of Isabel Allende's book, "La Casa de los Espiritus" (The House of Spirits) after he discovered that I actually could read Spanish much better than I could speak it. They often talked to me about what I was reading both before and after class. It was through their efforts that Chilean culture was slowly beginning to make sense to me

What does research say?

We know from the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) that vocabulary is learned through both incidental word learning and intentional word teaching. In his book, *The Vocabulary Book: Learning & Instruction*, (2006) Michael Graves offers four means by which vocabulary can be learned incidentally: (1) listening, (2) reading, (3) discussing, and (4) writing. However, teachers must be aware of the "second language reading threshold" described by Wallace (2001). In this phenomenon, L1 reading skills are not transferred to L2 until a relatively high level of L2 proficiency is reached. Since my students were intermediate level, they had already built up sufficient vocabulary to transfer their L1 reading abilities to their L2 reading without difficulty.

| Rare Words Per 1000 Words of Text | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Printed Texts | Television Texts | Adult Speech |
| Newspapers – 68.3 | Adult Shows – 22.7 | College graduates talking with friends / spouses – 17.3 |
| Popular Magazines – 65.7 | Children's Shows – 20.2 | |
| Adult Books – 52.7 | | |
| Children's Books – 30.9 | | |
| Preschool Books – 16.3 | | |

Encouraging students to read widely is a powerful way for them to learn new vocabulary words. Researchers found children's books contain about one-third (1/3) more **rare words** than even adult prime-time television shows or the everyday speech of college graduates. (Hayes and Ahrens, 1988)

Which books should students read?

With this in mind, I took my class to the institute's well stocked library. I told them to, "Find a book you like that isn't hard to read. The book you choose should be one in which you know most of the words!" Hu and Nation (2000, pg. 422) found that for unassisted reading for pleasure, learners need to know 98% of the words in the text. Currently, in the field of vocabulary teaching and learning, the threshold of meaningful input is considered to be 95% (Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997; Read, 2000; Nation, 2001).

In my experience as a reader, pleasurable reading means reading without the need to use a dictionary or becoming frustrated by a large number of unknown words. I felt that my students needed to be reading books which they could pull out and read anywhere, without the aid of a dictionary. This could be, for example; on a bus, on a train, on a ship, on a plane, on a trip, on a beach, in a doctor's waiting room, in a park, at home, etc.

I didn't worry so much about the reading level of the book itself or the fact that everyone wasn't reading the same book. Being forced to read only books that are considered difficult and which, at face value, hold little interest for them diminishes student motivation, fosters feelings of resentment, (Bintz, 1993) and creates doubts about the student's abilities. According to Dr. Jacqueline Manuel (2006, pg. 13), "...the most significant and consistently mentioned catalyst for reading difficulties and plummeting motivation levels in adolescents is inappropriate or ineffectively managed assigned reading materials".

What are the positive effects of reading?

Jim Trelease, (2001, pg. 1) points out: "The more you read, the better you get at it; the better you get at it, the more you like it; and the more you like it, the more you do it." This may sound catchy, but it is backed up by research. "The more reading you do, the better your comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, writing style, verbal fluency and general knowledge" (Poertscher and Achterman, 2002, pg. 32).

Keith Stanovich, (1986, pg. 381) coined the term "Matthew

Effect" to describe the positive effects of reading. When someone fails at learning to read or dislikes reading, they read less. Consequently, they do not gain vocabulary or practice in fluent, automatic reading. Reading becomes even more difficult with lack of reading practice. On the other hand, someone who enjoys reading reads more often. They gain vocabulary and become better readers. Reading becomes even easier. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

I wanted my students to enjoy reading their books and discuss them in class with me and the other students. This would give us an authentic purpose for using English communicatively, develop oral proficiency and build vocabulary incidentally

What about oral proficiency and communicative competence?

I wanted my students to enjoy reading their books and discuss them in class with me and the other students. This would give us an authentic purpose for using English communicatively, develop oral proficiency and build vocabulary incidentally. Omaggio (1986), tells us that "oral proficiency includes the ability to communicate verbally in a functional and accurate way in the target language (English). A high degree of oral proficiency implies having the ability to apply the linguistic knowledge to new contexts (topics) and situations." Table 2 shows oral proficiency rating scales (Omaggio, 1986, pg. 13). These were developed based on empirical observations of actual language learners.

Table 2: Oral Proficiency Rating Scales

| Government (FSI) Scale | Academic ACTFL/ETS Scale | Definition |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 5 | Native | Able to speak like an educated native speaker. |
| 4+ | Superior | Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations. |
| 4 | Superior | |
| 3+ | Superior | |
| 3 | Superior | |
| 2+ | Advanced Plus | Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics. |
| 2 | Advanced | Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. |
| 1+ | Intermediate-High | Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. |
| 1 | Intermediate-Mid | Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands. |
| | Intermediate-Low | Able to satisfy some basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements. |
| 0+ | Novice-High | Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances. |
| 0 | Novice-Mid | Able to operate in only a very limited capacity. |
| | Novice-Low | Unable to function in the spoken language. |
| | 0 | No ability whatsoever in the language. |

- ACTFL – American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
- ETS – Educational Testing Service.
- FSI – Foreign Service Institute.

This leads us to the concept of communicative competence. It is defined as, “**knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom**” (Klee, 1998, pg. 339). “Communicative competence aims to place language learners in authentic or near-authentic contexts in which they must be willing to take the risks inherent in expressing themselves in a foreign language and be resourceful in the use of vocabulary and structures to make themselves understood” (Omaggio, 1986,

pg. 4). The goal of communicative competence is to “allow learners to use the target language in meaningful, interactive and engaging ways” (Koike and Hinojosa, 1998, pg. 33). As we shall see later, the design of this reading activity met these prerequisites to develop communicative competence.

How did we discuss the student’s reading in class?

The students and I agreed to set aside 10-15 minutes each class to discuss a book that someone was reading. The activity was always a highlight of the class. We continued to discuss books they were reading throughout this course and in their final course at the institute (upper intermediate level).

Our reading discussions followed the seven principles listed below. A brief discussion of the reasoning behind the principles follows.

1. The book must be self-selected by the student.
2. The student must be able to read the book easily.
3. 10 – 15 minutes of a 90 minute class session was dedicated to discussion.
4. Two books (two students) were discussed per class.
5. Students summarized their reading and shared their reactions to the book.
6. Class members engaged in a spontaneous question and answer session.
7. There were no tests and no homework assigned related to the reading.

What is the reasoning behind the principles?

1 & 2 The reason for student self-selection of the book was to increase motivation to read. I felt that a student would be more likely to read a book if they had selected it based on their interests, and not the teacher's interests. Additionally, it brought a wider variety of reading material, with its specific vocabulary and grammar, into the classroom than if every student was reading the same book. By reading books at their comfort reading level, the students would improve their reading fluency.

3 & 4 The 10 – 15 minute time frame was an investment in oral proficiency development and by extension, communicative competence. I liked to do this activity usually at the beginning of the class. It provided oral fluency practice within a meaningful context right at the beginning of the class. This in turn provided the class as a whole with confidence and increased self-esteem as we began each class. Additionally, a late arriving student would not miss material which would be later tested. The contributions of the two students whose books were being discussed usually covered the allotted time as we interacted with the readers in spontaneous conversation.

5 & 6 The students always gave their reactions to the book first and the summary came last. This was done to give priority to the reading and the personal reactions of the students. We always waited until after the summary before asking questions due to the varying levels of oral proficiency in the same course. This allowed students with lower levels of oral proficiency to prepare for and practice their contributions before class, thus reducing anxiety and increasing both their accuracy and oral fluency.

7 The fact that no tests or homework were given (other than doing the reading outside class) made this a low stress, low anxiety activity. In the real world, no one says, "I want you to read this book. After you finish you're going to have to take a reading comprehension test". Such an approach toward reading isn't a recipe for pleasurable reading but I suspect that it happens in numerous reading programs around the world.

My students didn't have to worry about comprehension assessment, but rather on communicating through actual language use, using all of their language resources. They felt comfortable and relaxed when communicating their thoughts and opinions within the group in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. This was conducive to the eventual success of the activity.

These seven principles which I developed for this activity incorporate all ten of the principles for teaching extensive reading identified by Day and Bamford (2002, pp. 136 –141). However, my goal was to exploit the students' extensive reading in order to develop oral proficiency.

Conclusion

Why did my students respond so positively to reading and discussing books? There are so many factors which make this a successful activity that I am unable to provide a definitive answer. From a qualitative perspective however, this activity mirrors what we do naturally after reading a book: discuss it, recommend it, laugh about it, feel good about it and share it as a social activity. It is authentic language use, not to mention all the incidental vocabulary and grammar learning that takes place.

I wanted to share this simple reading / speaking activity because I have experienced first hand the power and the 'magic' that reading and discussing a book can bring into a classroom of English Language Learners. My EFL classes always read books in this way. Finally, I recommend it to all teachers who want to add an engaging and enjoyable activity into their classes that will benefit their students' enjoyment of reading for pleasure, development of oral proficiency and communicative competence.

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Mixed-Ability Groups Remixed

Patricia Villar

In an increasingly globalised world, with English as the established language for international business communication, demand for in-company (Business/ESP) English courses has reached a record high. And hand in hand with this we have seen the proliferation of a once rare but nowadays ever more frequent situation: having to teach a mixed-ability group i.e. a group where students have significantly different levels of linguistic competence.

Faced with such a situation, shall we run? Maybe, after all, the odds are heavily against us. Or, we might prefer to rise to the occasion and embrace the challenge. Teaching mixed-ability

classes may turn out to be a highly stimulating experience as long as we face reality right from the start and see both its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its opportunities and threats.

SWOT analysis of mixed-ability groups

A SWOT analysis is a tool borrowed from the world of business, used originally to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a given company or organization. I will now apply it to mixed-ability groups (MAGs), so as to provide a wider perspective of them.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The variety factor of MAGs contributes to their richness. ■ MAGs favour student-centred approaches for two different reasons: Thorough analysis of every student's needs becomes the inescapable starting point for course design, thus ensuring a truly tailored course. ■ The focus is taken away from the teacher as the only source of knowledge, while the possibilities for peer-teaching are enhanced. ■ MAGs are challenging to teach. | <p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The wide range of levels translates into a wide range of expectations on the part of students, which are harder to meet by the teacher on a single course. ■ Some students might not really profit from the course, the latter being too demanding or too easy for them. ■ Potential learning outcome is not maximized, due to the constant need for compromise between the different levels. ■ Every decision lying in the hands of the teacher is difficult to make, in terms of course design, lesson planning or classroom management. ■ Course design and lesson planning are time-consuming. ■ Class time can be stressful for teacher and students, both of whom are forced to adopt really active, flexible roles. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teachers' readiness to teach MAGs is at the core of much in-company teaching and has allowed the fast development of this comparatively new field. ■ Successful teaching of MAGs boosts the EFL/ESP teaching profession, placing it at a level where the sky's the limit. | <p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The levels of frustration that might arise from the course may lead to student drop-outs, which in turn could encourage the feeling that time and money are being wasted on the course, with its subsequent cancellation. ■ Unsuccessful teaching of MAGs might discredit the EFL/ESP teaching profession. |

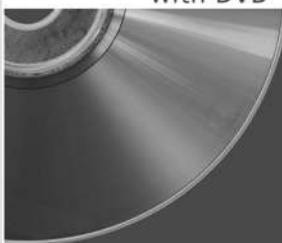
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It should hardly take us by surprise that the number of weaknesses listed should be higher than that of strengths. It goes without saying that if a MAG could be avoided in favour of as many even-level groups as necessary, that would be the best course of action. However, a company cannot be turned into a language centre, not to mention the sharp increase in costs that such a situation would impose on a company's training budget and how that might discourage a firm from spending any money at all on EFL/ESP training.

On the other hand, the opportunities that MAGs bring to EFL/ESP teachers are there for us to seize, and our success in that enterprise will depend on our capacity to refine our skills for capitalizing on strengths and getting over weaknesses. What I propose in this article is a systematized way of tackling the situation.

Dealing with MAGs at every step of Course Design

In her book *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Tricia Hedge devotes an entire chapter to the topic of course design. In it, she defines a series of steps intended to lead the teacher from the initial contact with a prospective student (client) to the delivery and evaluation of the whole course. With slight adaptation, these are the steps that she points out:

1. Needs Analysis
2. Establishment of Goals and Objectives
3. Syllabus Planning
4. Materials Design or Selection
5. Course Delivery
6. Evaluation

Hedge's six steps provide a basis on which I will build my suggestion for a systematic approach to dealing with MAGs.

Step one: Needs Analysis

Teachers with experience in ESP courses are surely familiar with the concept of needs analysis as the starting point of course design. It is of vital importance to have comprehensive information about what the students need so as to make sure that they will actually have acquired it by the end of the course. The information to be collected ranges from personal details, educational background, previous contact with the English language, learning preferences, hobbies and interests, expectations of the course, perceived linguistic strengths and weaknesses, actual linguistic strengths and weaknesses, to a detailed breakdown of the communicative situation in which English needs to be used. In the case of in-company courses, information about different aspects of the company must also be gathered.

Should the result of our needs analysis show that we will have to teach a MAG, there are a number of elements to take into account at each of the subsequent steps of course design, which will provide teachers with the sense of security that stems from the application of a systematized way of proceeding. As a result, the chances of succeeding will be higher, not only because we will be dealing with the language gap in what could be called a professional (as opposed to merely intuitive) way, but also as a consequence of the increase in our self-confidence, which will allow us to perform at our very best in every respect.

Step two: Establishment of Goals and Objectives

After all the data collected at the needs analysis stage has been processed, the first thing to be done is the establishment of the overall, ultimate goals of the course. It is quite likely that at this point every student will have the same goals. For example, a multinational establishing a small branch in a non-English-speaking country might want to train their local workforce to communicate in English with HQ. In this case, all students will have as a goal the

acquisition of skills to communicate with HQ on the phone, through e-mail or other forms of correspondence.

However, when the time comes to break down those general goals into mid-term objectives, these should be more ambitious for the stronger students than for the less strong. For example, by the end of the first two months, stronger students may aim at successfully writing an e-mail to somebody at HQ, while less strong ones might seek to understand an e-mail and manage to produce a short answer. There is no point in defining unrealistic objectives. The only possible outcome of such a situation is either daunting students before they even get started or frustrating them once they realize they have been unable to reach their objectives.

**It could be a good idea to create
two different syllabi, one being
more challenging than the other.
We must remember here that we
are not talking about two
disconnected syllabi, but two
versions of the same syllabus that
have different levels of ambition**

Step three: Syllabus Planning

Establishing different sets of objectives will inevitably lead to the planning of more than one syllabus. As suggested by Tessa Woodward in her book *Planning Courses and Lessons*, it could be a good idea to create two different syllabi, one being more challenging than the other. We must remember here that we are not talking about two disconnected syllabi, but two versions of the same syllabus that have different levels of ambition.

Proceeding in this way, at this stage, will have a number of advantages. Firstly, it will erase any possibility of the language gap becoming taboo in the class, as it will make it explicit without exposing any student, since nobody will have to choose one syllabus over the other. Both options will appear together, as part of the same course, and students will silently adopt the one they feel suits them better. Also, as everybody will identify with one of the syllabi, all students will feel a sense of belonging to the group, which is not always the case with MAGs, as the minority group (be it of stronger or less strong students) tend to feel apart.

Step four: Materials Design or Selection

Choosing materials for the course poses the following question: Will there also be two different sets of materials?

As I said in the previous section, the idea is to try not to expose those students that are less strong, since we cannot anticipate how open they will be about it. Therefore, we cannot make the gap as blatantly tangible as, for example, having two different textbooks – which, by the way, would be quite impossible to teach from.

A more sensible option would appear to be to steer clear of textbooks with these types of groups and rely more on authentic or semi-authentic materials, as well as on carefully planned classroom activities, both of which will provide the necessary scope for flexibility required in these contexts.

I will take magazine articles as an example of material that could be brought into a class. When choosing what article to bring, it is a good idea to find one on a topic that every member of the class can relate to, either because it deals with issues relating to the company's area of business or because it presents current affairs or any general topic. Besides this, it is recommendable to look for articles that combine stretches of text with some graphic support, such as photographs, drawings or graphs, which will make the meaning of the text more accessible to less strong students. But the bottom line will be the task you set around the text and how students are grouped in order to fulfil it, which leads us to the next step in course design: course delivery.

Step five: Course Delivery

I have called *Course Delivery* what Hedge calls *Teaching the Course*, which could also be called *Lesson Planning and Classroom Management*. This is the stage when all the long and mid-term decisions have already been made, and the time comes for planning and teaching lessons on a daily basis. If I may say, it is at this point that a clear line will be drawn between success and failure, at the interface between teacher and students.

Task, Grouping and Role-taking

As I said before, teachers can play around with the variables of task, grouping, and I will add, role-taking. By this I mean that if the same task is set for all students, it might be a good idea to group the stronger ones with the less strong, and encourage peer-teaching. Thus, every group will be able to do the task with similar chances of success. If, alternatively, students of similar levels are grouped together to do the same task, it is vital that the teacher assists the less strong closely, giving the stronger ones more independence and having some extra activities up his/her sleeve for fast-finishers.

Another possibility is to set different tasks, or rather, pre-tasks, and group students according to level. A more challenging task will be set for the stronger ones and a more mechanical one for the less strong. The important thing here is for a plenary session to come at the end of the class, where all tasks are performed or presented as forming different parts of the same whole, so as to keep a sense of unity inside the group.

In addition to this, especially in oral activities such as role-plays, mixed groups can be formed where role-taking will depend on language level. In other words, stronger students will adopt the most complex or demanding roles in terms of language, leaving the more accessible ones, linguistically speaking, for the less strong.

Needless to say, teachers will pick and choose from all these ideas the ones that they believe are more appropriate for the specific MAG they are teaching. Whatever the choice, a MAG will require a very active role on the part of both teacher and students, as can be inferred from the above-mentioned possibilities. It will therefore call for a lot of awareness-raising of the need for class participation and peer-teaching.

Other tips

A few other tips I have collected from my colleagues through the years have to do with elicitation, homework and work stations. When eliciting, teachers can try to rely on less strong students for content and real-life matters, while calling on stronger ones for questions of language. Another good idea is to set personalized homework, thus catering for individual needs without exposing less strong students while providing a chance for stronger ones to

further their language development. With regards to work stations, this term refers to the situation when completely different tasks are set for the same class, with students sitting at different corners of the room doing totally different activities. Personally I think that this is a good option only when nothing else seems to have worked and it has been impossible for teacher and students to create a sense of group unity. This might happen and we should also be prepared for it.

When eliciting, teachers can try to rely on less strong students for content and real-life matters, while calling on stronger ones for questions of language

Step six: Evaluation

The last step on our list is evaluation. I have to say that this is a wide-ranging term which includes the appraisal of absolutely every aspect of a course. For the sake of this article, I will simply refer to one aspect of evaluation: that of students' performance.

The most important thing to bear in mind is that if students' performance is to be evaluated in terms of more or less successful completion of the goals and objectives of a course, then having established a different set of objectives for stronger and less strong students will ensure the application of more realistic, personalized and therefore fairer criteria for evaluation. In the same way as there are two sets of objectives and two syllabi, there will be two yardsticks by which to measure students' performance. Whether through tests or just on-going assessment, teachers should always remember that.

Conclusion

Teaching MAGs is nothing more than an experiment which stands a good chance of going well but also risks going wrong. It is a land of shifting sands and that is something that EFL teachers, especially in-company ones, must come to terms with. It is my most sincere belief that we have nothing to lose by giving MAGs a good try, except maybe some precious free time but never our hope. And it is my hope that this article will provide teachers with a systematic approach and a toolkit with which they can embrace the next MAG that comes their way.

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Thinking... the forgotten skill?

Margaret Horrigan

There are traditionally four skills connected to language. These are reading, listening, speaking and writing. The first two skills are considered to be receptive skills while the latter are labelled 'productive' skills. What, then, is to be made of thinking? Is it a productive or receptive skill? Surely, it is both. It is, undoubtedly, a forgotten linguistic skill which needs attention nonetheless. In the English language classroom those uncomfortable moments of silence do not mean that nothing is happening. It is in these

What, then, is to be made of thinking? Is it a productive or receptive skill?

moments that the learners are thinking. Logically these moments should ensure that the learners are thinking about their language. Task Based Learning (TBL) has recently started to deal with this issue and some interesting points have arisen.

Planning

Jane Willis' (1996) framework for TBL lessons involves a period where learners plan their output. This planning is essentially time for learners to think about what they want to say and how they are going to say it. There are two basic types of planning: solitary and group, which can be subdivided into guided and unguided. The guided type of planning can involve dictionaries, teacher input or access to pedagogical grammars. Planning, therefore, can be depicted as follows:

| Planning | | | |
|----------|---|----------|--|
| Solitary | | Group | |
| Unguided | Guided | Unguided | |
| | Dictionaries/Teacher/Pedagogical Grammars | | |

What is missing from this picture, however, is the amount of time that learners have in which to plan their output. The emerging reality is that there are a number of variables to take into consideration when planning time is allocated in a lesson. Some final variables which must be mentioned here are the proficiency level of the learners and their age.

A small-scale study of planning

The learners involved in this particular study were four adolescents at pre-intermediate level of language proficiency. Three males and one female were asked to retell a picture story. The control group consisted of two students who were given one picture story while the experimental group were given another. After five minutes of solitary unguided planning the students were accompanied to a separate room where a single picture story, that of the experimental group which was turned upside down to avoid any further

opportunity to plan, and a tape-recorder awaited them. After thirty seconds of observing the picture story the students were recorded.

Despite expectations of better stories from the experimental group, those who effectively had planning time, there were noticeable differences between the groups. Essentially, those who had been allocated planning time, the experimental group, performed much more fluently and with a wider range of vocabulary than those who had no planning time at all, the control group. The latter, however, performed more accurately with fewer errors than the experimental group. This was a surprising find but on researching previous studies of a similar nature (Ellis 2003) it was to be expected.

It would seem that low-level proficiency learners perform fairly

What we get from providing a learner with planning time is really a snapshot of that individual's linguistic capabilities

predictably under such planning conditions. This is generally attributed to students' attempts at being more complex with their second language and pushing their output (Swain 2005) to a new level, so to speak. Explanations for this tendency lie in psycholinguistics where students' tend to think about their accuracy, complexity or fluency in unequal measures. The trend in planning time for low-level proficiency learners is generally in favour of complexity and fluency but with reduced accuracy. In practice this makes sense. If I as a low-level proficiency learner plan my output and then deliver this output in real time I want to 'show off'. I want to speak quickly and express concepts in a manner which resembles the complexity of how I speak my first language. This of course is at a price, and accuracy seems to pay it.

The moral?

So, it would appear at first glance that giving learners time to think about what they want to say and how they are going to say it does not deliver the goods. This is a superficial view, however. Remember that there are three aspects to language production, which are affected to varying degrees by planning. These are accuracy, fluency and complexity. By providing low-proficiency students with solitary unguided planning time both fluency and complexity are pushed to the upper limits of the learners' capabilities. Accuracy, however, drops considerably.

When learners are pushing themselves to be more complex with their output their real linguistic gaps may be coming to the fore. In effect, learners are producing language how *they* want to and not in a prescriptive manner, which may be found in more 'communicative' type tasks or activities. What we get from providing a learner with planning time is really a snapshot of that individual's linguistic capabilities. This is an invaluable opportunity for the teacher to deal with the learner's real linguistic needs and not previously set grammar rules, chunks or expressions. It is not my intent here to demean any grammatical or lexical approach to teaching. These are also valid approaches to teaching but they do not reveal where the learner is at linguistically.

This would appear to set the perfect stage for the initial testing stage of a Test Teach Test (Thornbury 1999) shaped lesson. Such a

lesson does not need to be delivered in a single hour. It should be delivered over at least two separate instances where the planning and storytelling take place in the first lesson and the teaching and final testing evolve in the second. This would provide the teacher with time to listen to and analyse recordings and subsequently plan the teaching and final testing stages.

Conclusion

When teachers allocate solitary unguided planning time to tasks for low-level proficiency students they are allowing a far more realistic picture of their learners' linguistic capabilities to emerge. Learners tend to produce more fluent and complex output although their accuracy does not benefit from this type of planning. This shows us what a learner truly needs to know rather than following a syllabus blindly. It is the only moment where the forgotten skill of thinking can be harnessed

in a language classroom productively. It is, for the moment, the only insight we can glean on what is going on in the students' minds regarding their second language.

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In Pursuit of the Motivational Menace: Is the Textbook a Demotivating Factor for Intensive EFL Students?

Gabi Bonner

Teacher: "Please open your textbooks to page 26."

A tortured, agonized look of dismal gloom distorts the students' faces. You would think I'd said something like "I've just decided to give you a three hour exam tomorrow morning", or "Linguists have just invented ten new English tenses". The painful sense of impending doom caused by my words pervades me with guilt. My students should be happy and they're not.

Students: "This is so boring." "Why do we have to use the textbook?" "Can we play a game instead?" "The textbook's horrible!"

So, are we talking about childish lamentations and moodiness in a typical teenage EFL class? Actually no. We're talking about my intermediate level intensive class of adults at Akcent International House, Prague, Czech Republic. They are aged between 21 and 28 and they're using *New Headway Intermediate* (Soars J and L: 1996).

As a very recent CELTA graduate and brand new teacher, lucky enough to be blessed with mainly wonderful, enthusiastic students who never complain, teaching (or trying to teach!) this intensive class presented a huge challenge. Against the (probably sound) advice from more experienced, and ever so slightly more cynical, colleagues who assured me that all intensive classes are never very motivated and they complain about everything and that I should just let it roll off my back, I decided (possibly over-ambitiously or even plain stupidly!) to try and get to the bottom of my students' demotivation due to their textbook.

Demotivation is caused by specific external forces that negatively affect learners' willingness to study the language, including finding study materials boring and/or complaining about them not being useful (see Dornyei, Z, Schmidt, R. 2001).

From this definition it seems apparent that my students were displaying the key characteristics of demotivation.

As well as the ostensible visual exponents of a serious lack of motivation due to the textbook, this problem was also brought to my attention by means of an informal feedback questionnaire that I administered to students. When asked to complete the statement *I get bored when:*, and *We do too much:*, the vast majority of students completed these sentences with reference to their textbook.

Having been a language learner myself on many occasions, I was aware that quite often it can simply be the 'idea' of using the textbook that demotivates students, and not the actual material in the textbook, or the textbook itself. This is the question I set out to answer:

Is it the contents of the textbook that seems to demotivate my students or is it simply the idea of using the textbook or a general textbook prejudice that is the demotivating factor (or the motivational menace)?

From my own experience of being a language learner and from my colleagues' comments, I hypothesise that it is probably simply the idea of using a textbook (ANY textbook!) that is the cause of my students' demotivation and not actually the textbook itself.

So how important is student motivation in language learning?

'Without student motivation there is no pulse, there is no life in the classroom' (Rost, M: 2001).

In the few months that I've been teaching, one of the most significant lessons I've learned (other than

remembering to play the tape in a listening lesson!) is that student motivation really is one of the most important factors in successful language learning. A fair amount of study has been undertaken in the field of motivation in second language acquisition in the last three decades (see, for example, Gardner & Lambert 1972, Naiman et al 1978, Oxford & Shearin 1994, Ushioda 1996, Dörnyei 2001), all of which supports this notion. Many researchers (i.e. Dörnyei et al.) claim that student motivation is in fact the most significant determining factor in retention and achievement, and if students are not motivated then learning and teaching will be an uphill struggle with disappointing results (see Tudor, I : 2004). So from my own observations and from the supporting literature, it's clear that learner motivation is of great importance and deserves to be examined.

Method:

'The important thing in action research is that the processes involved are helpful to the practising teacher's reflection, irrespective of whether they can be verified by someone else' (Wallace, M., in Saito-Stehberger: 2004).

I agree with this comment to a certain extent. However, I attempted to ensure that my data was as valid as possible. I applied the triangulation principle to the collection and analysis of my data, attempting to be as objective as possible by administering questionnaires and adopting as quantitative an approach as possible to the analysis of this data. I collected more than one source of data (i.e. questionnaires and videos of my lessons) and had more than one investigator analyse the visual data. Inter-observer reliability was measured at more than 85% (based on Allwright and Bailey: 1991).

13th January

Although I'd already discovered my students' dislike of the textbook through informal feedback, I decided to administer a questionnaire pertaining to students' attitude towards their textbook in order to obtain some concrete data to work with.

15th January

I taught a reading lesson based entirely on the textbook (*New Headway Intermediate* pp 70-72), following the exact order of tasks as set out in the textbook with no supplementation or effort to disguise the material or to 'jazz it up' in any way. There were seven students present that day. I had students fill in a questionnaire called 'Taking my motivational temperature on a language task', based on Cohen and Dörnyei (2001), but simplified linguistically so that it was appropriate for intermediate level students. After being made aware of what material they would be working with, students filled in the 'pre-task motivation' section of the questionnaire, which measures to what extent they feel they are going to enjoy the lesson, how useful they will find it and how motivated they feel to take part in the lesson. They rated their level of motivation on a scale of one to four, with four being the highest and one being the lowest. At the half way point of the lesson students filled in the 'mid-task motivation' section of the questionnaire, in which they rated to what extent they were enjoying the lesson, how useful it was and how motivated they felt to finish the lesson. After the lesson they filled in the 'post-task motivation' section of the questionnaire in which they rated to what extent they enjoyed the lesson, how useful it was for them and how motivated they felt to take part in similar lessons in the future.

The lesson was filmed, and a colleague and I watched the video of the lesson and visually rated the level of students' motivation at each stage of the lesson, recording our data on graphs (see graphs 3 and 4 below). We visually measured students' level of motivation based on 'visual signs of motivation' (Tudor: 2004), which outlines criteria to look for such as: students participate

willingly and actively with one another and with the teacher in learning activities, students are attentive to what the teacher and other students say and the questions they ask, and students generally seem happy to be there.

18th January

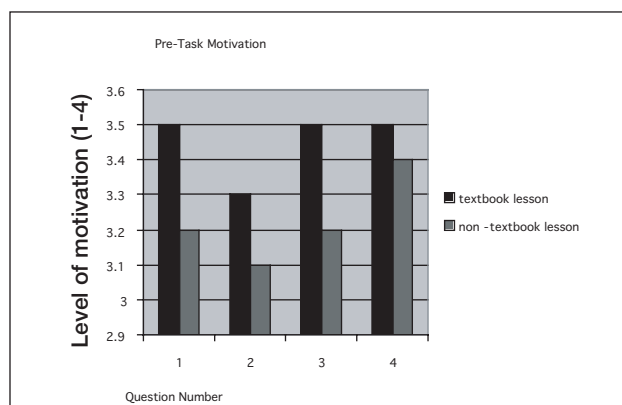
I taught another reading lesson from *New Headway Intermediate* (pgs 80-82), again following the exact order of tasks as outlined in the textbook. However this time I cunningly typed the reading text in a different font and added pictures to make it look as exciting as possible. I made a worksheet to accompany it with exactly the same comprehension questions and tasks from the textbook, but disguised. The aim here was for students to be unaware that the material they were working with was exactly the same as in their textbook. Students filled in the same 'taking your motivational temperature on a language task' questionnaire at three stages of the lesson, and the lesson was filmed. There were nine students present that day. My colleague and I watched the video and visually rated students' motivation at the same stages of the lesson (see graphs 3 and 4 below).

Results and implications:

So, let's begin with the results of the questionnaire on students' attitude towards the textbook. Very surprisingly and completely contradictory to my hypothesis, the results of the questionnaires indicate that in fact the majority of students (56%) feel that the textbook helps them to learn. The same percentage of students do not feel unhappy when the teacher says what I thought were the dreaded words 'Please open your textbooks to page 26'. An overwhelming majority of students find the material and topics in the textbook at least mildly interesting (88%), and the same percentage of students would be unhappy if they did not use the textbook. So interestingly enough it turns out that the 'doom and gloom' associated with the textbook was nowhere near as serious as I had initially thought. Possible reasons for this are discussed below.

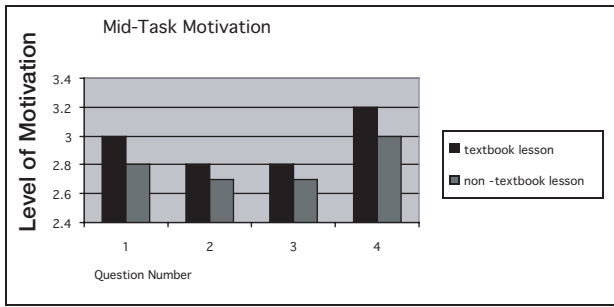
Now let's turn to the results of the 'taking your motivational temperature on a language task' questionnaires. The results are summarised on graphs 1, 2 and 3 below, with the questions that correspond to the numbers on the x axis given in the key underneath each graph. Each graph (entitled 'pre-task motivation', 'mid-task motivation' and 'post-task motivation' respectively) illustrates the average level of motivation of the students at the same stage of the lesson on both days.

Graph 1: Pre-Task Motivation



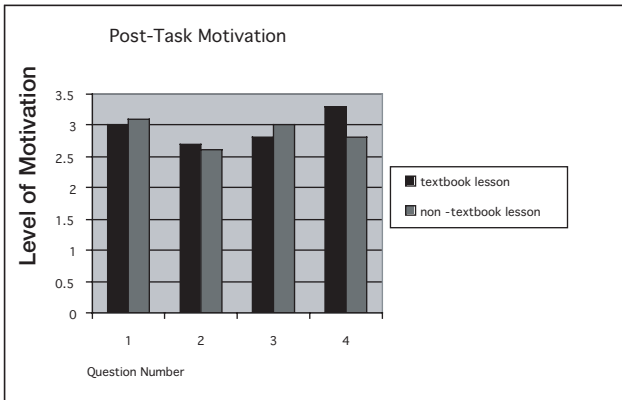
- Question 1: How much am I going to enjoy this lesson?
- Question 2: How important will this lesson be for me?
- Question 3: Will this lesson be useful to me?
- Question 4: How motivated am I to take part in this lesson?

Graph 2: Mid-Task Motivation



- Question 1: Am I enjoying this lesson?
- Question 2: Is it better than I thought it would be?
- Question 3: Am I learning something?
- Question 4: How motivated am I to finish this lesson?

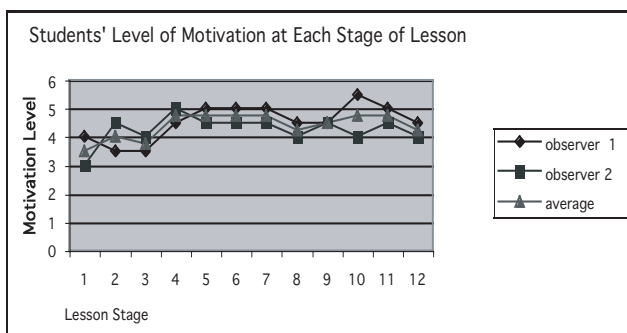
Graph 3: Post-Task Motivation



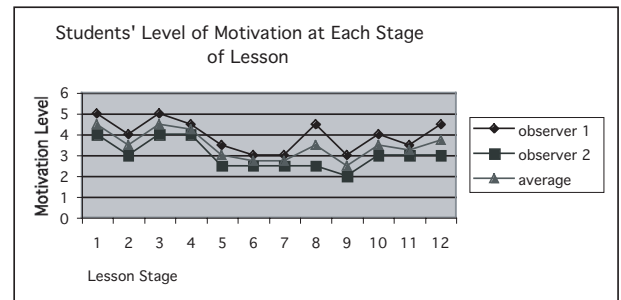
- Question 1: Was the lesson interesting?
- Question 2: Did I learn something?
- Question 3: Was the lesson better than I thought it would be?
- Question 4: How motivated am I to do similar tasks in the future?

Interestingly enough, the results of the motivational questionnaires support the findings from the previous questionnaires which measured students' attitudes towards the textbook, and strengthen the evidence against my hypothesis. Students' motivation is consistently higher during almost all stages of the 'textbook' lesson than in the 'non-textbook' lesson. The results of the video observations also support this notion, with students' visual motivation being consistently higher in the 'textbook' lesson (see graphs 4 and 5 below).

Graph 4: Students' level of motivation at each stage of 'textbook' lesson on 15/01/07



Graph 5: Students' level of motivation at each stage of 'non- textbook' lesson on 18/01/07



- Observer 1: my colleague**
- Observer 2: myself**

Not only do my results negate my hypothesis, which predicted that my students' motivation problem was linked to the idea of using a textbook, but they also infer that the source of the problem does not lie in 'boring' and 'uninteresting' topics and material in the textbook either. Intrigued by the grandeur of my misjudgement, I decided to conduct an oral feedback session with my students to try to shed some light on why they were more motivated by the 'textbook' lesson than the 'non-textbook' lesson despite their regular complaints about the textbook.

Several students mentioned that they like the sense of 'structure' and 'direction' that they feel when they're working from the textbook, as opposed to being given worksheets and not always knowing where and how the material fits in with the course as a whole. Other arguments for the 'textbook' lesson included not wasting paper and not having to worry about losing loose pieces of paper or not knowing where to put them.

So if the 'motivational menace' is not the textbook itself and it is not 'textbook prejudice' either, then what is it? I'm beginning to think that maybe my rather more cynical and slightly jaded colleagues may have been right in saying that intensive students are always less motivated than their 'English once a week' peers, simply because they have three hours of lessons a day. As a result they become fatigued and quite possibly appear more demotivated than they actually are. It is interesting to note that my colleague who observed the filmed lessons (observer 1) gave the students' level of motivation a higher rating than I did (observer 2) at almost every stage of both lessons. Could this be another indication that the motivation 'problem' isn't actually as grave as I had feared?

So where to go from here?

I believe that even though my research hypothesis turned out to be incorrect, the results have made me think about my intensive class and their motivational 'issues' from a wider perspective. Are they really demotivated just because they're tired, or is it more complicated than that? Are they really as demotivated as they appear? I believe that to answer these questions, a bigger scale study needs to be done to delve into and measure these students' motivation for studying English at all. We need to look at their motivational orientations (Gardner: 1972) for studying English, including instrumental and integrative orientations as well as intrinsic and extrinsic orientations (i.e. are they learning English because they need it for work? (extrinsic motivation). Do they enjoy the intellectual challenge of learning a language? (intrinsic motivation). Is it important for them to identify with the target culture? (integrative motivation). Did their parents or someone else suggest that they take the course? (instrumental motivation). The results

of a study examining these motivational factors and of an attempt to delve into the driving forces behind these students' motivation would no doubt be useful for all teachers of English as a foreign language in this context and probably other similar contexts as well.

'Teacher behaviour is a powerful motivational tool' (see Dornyei: 2001).

In the meantime, there are several types of immediate action that my co-teachers and I can take to attempt to increase our students' level of motivation. There is abundant evidence that using authentic materials in language learning increases student motivation (see for example Peacock, M: 1997). I believe more effort on our part to supplement the textbook, preferably with authentic material, would be appreciated by students. I think we should also try to provide as much positive encouragement as possible to our students by highlighting their progress and finding ways of showing them how far they've come since the beginning of the course (for example comparing written work and/or tests from the beginning of the course with more recent ones). Classroom projects are an effective way to consolidate and extend learning, enhance classroom dynamics and promote learner-autonomy, all of which serve to increase student motivation (see Dornyei: 2001). This type of activity, centred around a topic that students perhaps choose themselves and taking place over several

lessons, could also help to boost our students' motivation. As well as a bigger scale project looking at motivational orientations, I propose to implement as many of the above suggestions as possible, and the results could well provide enticing opportunities for subsequent action research projects!

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Principles behind Materials Design: Some Tips for Designing Effective Course Materials

Max Orlando

Designing course materials is, undoubtedly, one of the most exciting tasks that a teacher has to perform when planning lessons. We design materials not only when we produce activities to cater for our students' wants and needs, or exams and tests to check how much students have learnt, but also when we adapt and recycle existent publications such as course books, supplementary books, resource packs, etc. In fact, ideally, a material designer should have both a background in education and teaching experience since, when we create activities and tasks, we visualize them, i.e. we form a picture of how they would work in a real lesson. However, very often, our expectations regarding classroom dynamics and students' learning and performance are not met. It is on these occasions that we realize that materials testing and pilot programmes are an essential stage of course design.

As a teacher and later as a university teacher of Course and Materials Design, I have produced and tested materials for language programmes with specific language needs. One of the most fruitful things of this activity is the possibility of gathering students' impressions and comments regarding these materials. The methods used for data collection have always been questionnaires using a wide variety of techniques, interviews and self reports. The aim of this article is to present a list of tips for designing effective materials that derive from the students' main concerns and comments in the pilot programmes I have mentioned above. Some of these tips may sound obvious but we consider it is always important not to ignore them.

The Layout

There are two elements that good materials should not lack. Tidiness contributes to the success of the learning goals. Secondly, each activity should be accompanied by clear instructions. Ideally, these instructions should state what the students have to do and why the activity is being done. Doing an activity with a clear goal in mind is more challenging than doing it just for its own sake.

The Reason for Having a Purpose

Our point of departure is the students' needs, wants, likes and dislikes. We must make a distinction between thinking that we know what the students need and really knowing it. The more aware we are of the learners' needs and expectations and the more we take them into account when preparing our lessons, the more effective the materials will be. Gathering information about the learners' main goals and expectations at the beginning of a course is never pointless.

Once we have this information in mind, and we integrate it into the goals of the course, we can start designing coherent materials. Materials are coherent as long as they follow the aims of the course, lesson or programme. We have found that, generally speaking, students enjoy taking part in activities if they find a clear purpose for doing them. Therefore, we think it is vital that the learners should be aware of the goals of the activities, of the lessons, of the units or modules and of the programme or course in general.

A Sense of the Whole

What we mean by *a sense of the whole* is the possibility of connecting learning materials with the real world, and what we mean by the real world is that which concerns the learners' experiences,

Students enjoy taking part in activities if they find a clear purpose for doing them

lives, hopes and fears. Materials that reflect this world will help the learner create long-lasting mental constructions and give shape to the knowledge recently acquired. They will also activate the desire for the unknown and the reconstruction of one's prior knowledge. Performing real-life tasks will help the learner put into practice what they know and create a sense of fulfilment. Thus, the topics we select will play a vital role in the development of a course.

The Topics

The selection of the topics will depend on the learners' background, age, interests, profession, etc. Ideally, they should be relevant to them, i.e. realistic, challenging and interesting. Cross-curricular activities that integrate different knowledge areas and disciplines may enhance the students' involvement in the teaching-learning process. In the same way, doing in another language what we do with our mother tongue can give us a sense of success and a feeling of satisfaction. From the needs analysis report, we generally find general areas of interest and personal preferences as well. Therefore, the more varied the topics in a course, the wider the range of likes and needs they will cater for.

The Teacher, the Learner and the Method

Every teacher has his/her own teaching style. However, it is necessary to adapt ourselves to the rationale of the materials in order to accomplish the aims of the lesson. Both in the case of teachers using other designers' materials and of teachers who create their own, it is essential to create the atmosphere and classroom dynamics that best reflect the learning objectives. The teacher's

performance and the students' interaction should go hand in hand with the linguistic and pedagogic goals of the activity, lesson, unit or course. According to the rationale, is the teacher considered a guide, a monitor, an instructor or a source of information? And what's the role of the learner? What we mean is that a set of motivating, interactive and productive activities will be so if the teacher handles them as such.

Performing real-life tasks will help the learner put into practice what they know and create a sense of fulfilment

Some Conclusions

Course materials play a vital role in the teaching-learning process. The reason for their existence is to facilitate learning. Both teachers and learners spend long hours using textbooks, readers, workbooks, resource packs, practice sheets, dictionaries, etc. We trust them and we believe they will help us use a second or foreign language successfully. However, we believe that the materials meant to be used in class must meet certain basic requirements:

- They should be eye-catching and easy to use, i.e. they should have a user-friendly layout.
- They should be accompanied by clear instructions.
- They should make the learner aware of the goals behind each activity and/or task.
- They should help the learner achieve the goals of the course.
- They should reflect the learner's world as a whole: its codes, norms, problems, interests, etc.
- The topics should be of interest to the learner.
- The method, the teacher's performance and the classroom dynamics should go hand in hand with the rationale proposed by the writer or designer.

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The Teaching Machines

Gerry Aldridge

The tentacles of technology are attempting to wheedle their way into professions whose success has largely been attributed to their close and personal contact with the public domain. Instead of the local corner shop, we have dispensers. There are machines where there used to be people and now, believe it or not, we are replacing teachers with computers.

So, what is the teacher's role in the classroom? Is it solely the transmission of knowledge from one source to another? Is the teacher becoming another obsolete human being? There are some

who obviously think so and they are building schools and designing English language learning courses which require only a minimal amount of human intrusion. The students, unfortunate enough to have been lulled into such an institution, are then expected to sit at a workstation and supposedly absorb the information they are viewing.

If they have a query there is no one to answer it, at least not in the classroom anyway. If you imagine a learning environment in which you are not allowed to ask any questions, you will find it is a complete

contradiction of thought because learning to question is also part of the collective whole we call education.

There are of course some wonderful things to be done with computer technology and the last few years have seen a great surge of innovative ideas in the world of teaching. Schools have managed to set up links with other schools enabling them to interact with other pupils in other countries. There certainly is no better meaningful practice than that. Some amazing programmes have been designed which aid students and make the whole learning process that much more varied and enjoyable. The Internet is information, so of course it is good and there are countless benefits that come with the development of technology, but it should serve us and not the contrary.

As a teacher myself I have always found the spontaneity and the autonomous interest of my students, which I endeavour to keep alight, the main ingredients for a healthy and productive lesson. When I am a student, I like to regard my teacher as a mentor from whom I am allowed to extract information and interact with on a personal level.

You will never find me in a virtual classroom. I want to know the names of my students' friends and family, get to know them and find out what they did last Saturday.

I want to talk and chat and do all those kinds of things that humans are supposed to do.

ih *For the last ten years, since completing a highly motivating and inspirational CELTA course, Gerry has been teaching English in Portugal. He spent the first four years working for IH Lisbon, and then decided to leave and focus on his writing. He now writes professionally on a regular basis, and would like to thank Colin and Cathy Macmillan, Andrew Nye and Paula De Nagy for their inspiration and support.*



The Kingdom of Playland Embassies Wanted for an ESOL Micronation

Andreas Grundtvig

The Idea

In 2002 I received an invitation to visit Roughs Tower, a metallic defence fort off the East Coast of England. Abandoned after the war it had sat six miles out, rusting in international waters until the arrival in 1967 of Roy Bates. Bates, a retired Army Major, seized the tower, made it his own little country and declared himself Prince. The Principality of Sealand has since hit the headlines a number of times and has subsequently become perhaps the most famous of all micronations.

Looking up 'micronation' in Wikipedia, I found the following definition:

any entity that resembles independent nations or states but is unrecognized by them, and for the most part exists only on paper, on the Internet, or in the minds of their creators

What an excellent idea for a project, I thought. I was due to start teaching an intensive summer course of English to teenagers at IH Coimbra in Portugal and I wanted to do something a bit different. Founding a class micronation sounded like good fun.

Before the class could start working on new nation however, I realised it was important to try and decide what one was. Defining 'nation' is much more difficult than it might first seem and there are always exceptions. I paired the learners off and gave them each the name of an English speaking nation to research. I tried to look for opposites i.e. The United States and Pitcairn Island, just to give us a bit of contrast. The class agreed that a nation needed people, a constitution, some symbols, a flag perhaps and most importantly it would be a good idea to have some kind of territory. I had recently read about nations whose only territorial claim was in cyberspace. This would be the perfect place to present the project: on a website.

Activities that Built a Nation

To determine some territory I remembered an activity I had seen back in my early days of teaching: I drew a simple shape on the board and calling on a little bit of my learners' imaginations, made the shape an island. It was then given geographical features, which

were randomly named: the Himalayas, the Amazon River and Loch Ness. The island itself was named Playland¹ and we chose a suitable climate, flora and fauna for it. To make the island a nation we needed to apply some of the attributes we had agreed on earlier.

The learners decided that it should be a constitutional monarchy. HM William I was named Head of State but his reign was a very short one. After just one minute the king was

The Kings of Playland, like their island, existed only in cyberspace which made it very difficult for them to make any decisions. They were made 'non-consecutive'

overthrown by HM William II – who, the learners decided, sounded better! The Kings of Playland, like their island, existed only in cyberspace which made it very difficult for them to make any decisions. They were made 'non-consecutive'.

Playland needed a government so the class held their first political election. In it they all elected one another as cabinet ministers based on what they liked to do. They each adopted pseudonyms (displaying the project on the Internet, I was careful to protect learner identities, and subsequently gave myself the title 'Lord Protector' as well as already being Prime Minister). Following an adaptation of 'find someone who', passports were made and issued.

The time had come to draft a constitution. A slight change in the wording in Jean Greenwood's 'Classroom contract' from her book *Activity Box* provided a nice template to work with. Once the ministers had agreed to the terms, each pledged allegiance to the

new constitution by promising to be good to all people and animals and follow the rules of the countries in which they lived. In return they asked for the right to study in school but be able to have a five day weekend and just do 2 days of work.

Playland was starting to look like a nation but it needed a few more personal characteristics. Giving the Playlanders a gapped version of the lyrics to a well-known Men at Work song was an easy step to the creation of the national anthem 'Land of Playland'. I then asked the ministers what symbols usually represented countries: 'an animal... a food... a flower'. We went back to the Internet for more research.

The class enthusiasm for building Playland was lovely to see but when the project was mentioned on the BBC the Playlanders were thrilled

In a Google image search, the Playlanders found a nice picture of an orange butterfly and a rose that they liked. They organised a referendum to find their favourite food and spaghetti became the national dish. Choosing the colours of the flag was now easy: orange (the colour of the national butterfly and rose), white (the colour of spaghetti) and blue (the colour of the sea surrounding Playland island). Minister of Football, Telmo Micaelo MP, was appointed vexillographer and given a blank flag template. He went to the Internet to have a look at some flags of other countries then decided what he thought would look best. Telmo's flag has since been unfairly accused of being an 'upside down Russian flag'.

Being a small group, the learners reached agreement easily and as a language learning activity Playland achieved my hopes of it being both fun and memorable. The class enthusiasm for building Playland was lovely to see but when the project was mentioned on the BBC the Playlanders were thrilled.

Extending the Hand of Friendship

The government had decided to contact leaders and monarchs of other micronations to see if they would diplomatically recognise Playland. When we wrote a class email to King Dom of BBC Radio Kent he was one of the first to hold out his hand of friendship. Others included the President of Molossia (a nation that pegs its currency to the value of cookie dough), Emperor Eric Lis of the Aerican Empire (which claims the northern half of the planet Pluto) and author and Monarch, HM King Nicholas I who wrote from the Copeman Empire (his caravan in Norfolk) to ask our opinion on the banning of turkey twizzlers from some British school dinners – this in turn, sparked off a mini project.

I told my school about Playland, they started to doubt my sanity. I told my friends, they already knew I was insane. A good friend who ran a school in Lithuania was keen to be part of the project and so the second Playland Embassy was opened at ILS in Vilnius. Our classes linked up using a chat program on the Playland website and started to learn about the countries where their chatmates lived, places they'd only briefly heard about before. Ambassador Flopsy Lukiskiu held an open day and welcomed Playlanders. The Portuguese and Lithuanian embassies have since worked together on such things as online chat sessions, Playland referendums, competitions and interview sessions in which Sealand has also been extremely co-operative.

Lonely Planet published a travel guide to Micronations and I started to consider the status of Playland. I found that most

micronations claimed sovereignty on the basis of the Montevideo Convention, a treaty signed by predominant leaders of New World nations (including the US) in 1933. It set out four criteria for statehood:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. A permanent population | Despite having 100% emigration, Playland had citizens who had sworn allegiance to the constitution and carried passports. |
| 2. Government | A democratically elected one! |
| 3. The capacity to enter into relationships with other Sovereign States | Playland had been recognised by several famous micronations. |
| 4. A defined territory... | |

Territory was still a major issue. Even the Aerican Empire were only prepared to offer 'Conditional Diplomatic Recognition' as Playland territory existed only in cyberspace. Fortunately I knew of this piece of land! In the Lithuanian highlands lay a little farm, surrounded by tranquillity and mostly unused. The owner was unwilling to sell but would be happy to agree to a 'Hong Kong' type lease. The Playlanders wrote to the Lithuanian President for approval.

A few weeks later President Valdas Adamkus sent the Playlanders a signed photograph. The answer to our question came from the National Land Service under the Ministry of Agriculture and was addressed to The Rt Hon Andreas Teacher MP. It said that 'in the Lithuanian Republic there is no limitation for foreigners, whether physical or juridical persons to rent private land in Lithuania'!

Shortly after this, Prince Michael of Sealand sent a special 'Declaratio Regius' to say that Sealand now recognised Playland as 'An independent and sovereign country'!

It is now almost a year since Playland was founded and it has been a while since I saw the founders of our nation. The population grows, however, and Playland continues to involve classes of all levels and ages in different countries. It generates valuable food for lesson ideas and motivates learners into doing something very personal at the same time as being cross-curricular. Contributing to the growth of Playland appeals to a host of learning styles and intelligences, including those which can be difficult to involve in a language learning class such as the spatial, naturalistic and interpersonal.

For me as teacher, it is a classroom activity that has become a hobby. At the IH Portugal Training Day I delivered a seminar related to long-term projects where Playland was a major feature. The seminar was a lot of fun as well as productive in generating ideas for future long-term projects. I am sure the Playland government would be delighted to arrange for this seminar to be delivered at other schools.

Playland has been noticed. A few ESL writers have been in touch and passed on their wishes and the search is on for 'Embassies'. I would love to hear from any schools who would be interested being a part of Playland and linking up on international chats, join in competitions and share other fun Esol activities.

Just this week two Lithuanians arrived in Portugal and visited a class of Playlanders. After being told about the nation, the visitors pledged allegiance to the constitution and were naturalised.

I am often asked if Playland has a political or religious goal and the answer is always no. If, however, Playland can be instrumental in perhaps making the voices of younger people heard at the same time as providing a bit of fun, then I am more than happy. Playland's national heroine is Astrid Lindgren, a famous storyteller from Sweden, who fought for children's rights through the power of fairytales.

The Rt Hon A. Teacher MP
playlandgov@anglobus.com

'Playland was so named by The Rt Hon Carolina Silva MP, Minister of Shopping

ih *Employed as ADOS at IH Coimbra in Portugal, Andreas Grundtvig has taught English and Swedish for 12 years in Portugal, Lithuania, Spain, Gibraltar and England (as well as the odd lesson in Playland). He has delivered national seminars on multiple intelligences, motivation and classroom projects and holds a DTESOL.*



Living in Beirut

Elaine Kniveton

So, what do you think of when you think of Beirut? If you've been watching the news over the last couple of years, you probably think of bombs, assassinations and street protests. But, living here, the reality can be quite different.

A Bit of Background

I came to Lebanon in November 2003 and was involved in the final stages of the IH affiliation process before we officially became IH Beirut in January 2005. A month later, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri began what has come to be known as the 'Cedar Revolution' with peaceful demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops which had occupied Lebanon since the end of the civil war. The Syrians left in April 2005 but this wasn't the end of the story. Since then, there has been a series of assassinations and attempted assassinations targeting politicians and journalists known to be outspoken critics of Syria, the most recent being in December 2006. In addition, last summer Lebanon suffered severely during a 34-day war with Israel, which has left infrastructure destroyed and the economy crippled.

and I, as trainers, reworked the timetable and increased input hoping that we would be able to restart TP in a few days. Unfortunately, the bombing continued and, on the following Wednesday, we had to admit defeat. We signed off the course as best we could and closed up the school. I should stress that the Israelis usually bombed at night and not in the area near

You might wonder why on earth anyone would want to come to Lebanon!

We also run a CELTA course in July and it was Thursday of week 2 that the war started

Bombs and a CELTA course

So how has IH Beirut been affected by these events? The war last summer had the greatest impact when we had to close for three weeks. July is one of our busiest times of the year when our student body is mostly made up of local school students, Lebanese living abroad who have come home for the summer and tourists from the Gulf who spend their holidays in Lebanon. We also run a CELTA course in July and it was Thursday of week 2 that the war started. We had 7 local trainees and 5 who had come from overseas. Immediately 3 locals and 2 visitors decided not to continue the course and we had to suspend teaching practice, as we had no students. Our language classes also stopped completely. Jo Newton

the school so we weren't being foolhardy or taking unnecessary risks by deciding to continue. In fact, continuing was the best way to stay busy and avoid spending all day at home watching the news and worrying. Finally, though, Jo and I, and another teacher, decided to evacuate on Royal Navy warships to Cyprus and then on to the UK. The remaining non-Lebanese trainees also left.

The war lasted 34 days and the school opened for business immediately, the morning after the ceasefire was signed. We are all thankful that none of our staff was injured. However, two teachers working on a UNDP project were stranded in a village in South Lebanon for the duration of the war and others' homes were damaged or destroyed in the bombings. I came back at the beginning of October to start another CELTA course, which I ran with Mike Cattlin. Three of the trainees from July completed their training along with 5 others. We haven't looked back since, despite the continuing internal political strife that there has been since the end of the war.

IH Beirut

After all that you might wonder why on earth anyone would want to come to Lebanon! So, let me tell you a little bit about living and working here. Let's start with IH Beirut: the school is situated in east Beirut and has been open since October 1995. We teach mainly adult students, the majority of whom already speak Arabic and French. Most Lebanese are educated either in English or in French from the time they start school until they finish university and therefore grow up almost bilingual. There is also a sizable

Armenian population in Beirut who speak Armenian as a first language so English may be a third or fourth language for them. As Lebanon fell under the French mandate until 1946, French has traditionally been the country's second language. However, English is becoming more popular with businesses switching from French and expecting their employees to speak it as fluently as

mentioned the fabulous food and wine...

Beirut is a city of contrasts; there are 18 officially recognised religious sects so you hear the call to prayer and church bells; there are modern glass-fronted buildings next to restored Ottoman-era mansions next to buildings scarred by bullet and shell holes from the civil war; there is extreme poverty and 25% unemployment but people carry state-of-the-art mobile phones and wear designer sunglasses; 30-year-old rust-ridden Mercedes do battle on the roads with new 4x4s and sports cars.

There are so many aspects of a modern European city here but at heart Lebanon is still a third world country. Conflicts, occupation and political paralysis have left Lebanon with huge debts and poor infrastructure. Salaries are low and many people work two jobs or rely on money sent from family working outside the country. Roads are in a terrible condition and were made worse by the bombing of bridges all over the country during the war last summer. The electricity supply can be uncertain; all houses are hooked up to private generators as well as the mains.

Despite the challenges that people face on a day-to-day basis, the Lebanese retain a great zest for life and living. The country both captivates and frustrates me but I can honestly say, despite everything that has happened since I arrived, I have never regretted my decision to come. I highly recommend a visit – you won't regret it either!

And finally...

I'd like to finish by thanking everyone for their help and support during the war last year. In particular, thanks to all at IHWO, the centres who offered our trainees places to finish their CELTAs and to IH Cyprus who offered to house us evacuees on the way out. We really appreciate everything you did for us. Thanks!

Some facts about Lebanon

- situated in the eastern Mediterranean bordering Israel/Palestine and Syria
- total population 4 million
- population of Beirut 1 million
- 18 officially recognised religious sects
- distance north to south 230km
- total area 10,452km²
- Khalil Gibran (author of *The Prophet*), Salma Hayek (actress), Shakira (singer), Nicolas Hayek (founder of Swatch) are all of Lebanese descent

Beirut is a city of contrasts; there are 18 officially recognised religious sects so you hear the call to prayer and church bells

they speak French. In addition, the Lebanese are great travellers: the population of Lebanon is approximately 4 million but there are estimated to be 12 million Lebanese living abroad, many in English-speaking countries. Therefore, students are very motivated and want to make progress fast. They come to class 4 times a week, for two hours every day. Compare that to the standard European 2 x 90-minute lessons a week! As students, they can be demanding, noisy, undisciplined with a tendency to cheat in tests! But, from a teacher's point of view, it means you never have a dull lesson or an awkward silence when no-one has anything to say! They can also be very generous – at Christmas, despite the current economic situation, our students donated hundreds of gifts that were distributed to local children's homes.

Living in Beirut

Beirut is an incredibly vibrant town. It is the party capital of the Middle East with nightlife to rival any big city in the world. There are restaurants, bars and clubs all filled with hip young (and not so young!) things where you can eat, drink and dance every night of the week. In the winter, there's great skiing in the mountains above the city. In the summer, there are beaches and resorts where you can work on your tan and escape the heat of the city. If history is your thing, Lebanon can't be beaten with some of the best preserved Roman ruins in the world and, for the art buffs, there are international music and film festivals. And I haven't even



Elaine Kniveton is the Director of Studies and resident CELTA trainer at IH Beirut. Before arriving in Lebanon in 2003, she worked in France and the Czech Republic.



IH Summer In England or An Idiot's Guide to Summer School

Nicky Yeeles

Sunday 2nd July

Destination England. Nine months in Latvia was nothing compared to the bag I have to pack for four weeks in rural Buckinghamshire: clothes for every season, enough wine to see me through the first week, and three files of EFL material. I have my last roast dinner in a pub and bid farewell to normal food for a month.

I spend the first hours sipping chardonnay in a field with old chums from last year. I can't help but muse that the price of a glass here could buy you a whole bottle in Riga. Welcome to Newlands Park.

I go to bed early before placement testing the next day. My room is collegiate with just a hint of prison cell. There's a desk, a small single bed, and a washbasin in the corner. At midnight there is a mousy knock on my door. The girl from Lisbon has a spider in her room and can I come and get rid of it for her? I oblige, to the tune of hysterical 13-year-olds dizzy with the sweet taste of freedom. At 1 am I am up and down the stairs asking the Russians to stop running/banging doors/ shouting. Each time I am greeted with a well-rehearsed 'Yes, yes' and each time it takes about five minutes before the Olympics begin again. Around one thirty they subside. I stick in my earplugs and try to sleep.

My room is collegiate with just a hint of prison cell

Monday 3rd July

I get up just in time to scrape a cooked breakfast, the best meal of the day. In between their written tests, we sit on the grass and chat with the students to ascertain their oral level. They are all 13-18 years old, and most are pre/mid-intermediate, although at 11am we have to dig two Saudi brothers, absolute beginners, out of (the same) bed. Awwab and Alhusain* star again later in the Watford shopping centre showdown. They don't turn up at the meeting point and all hell breaks loose. Every centre security guard is employed in scouring the shops for them, and we make plans for IH staff to stay and hunt. The boys saunter in from the Watford streets 25 minutes later, completely oblivious to the panic they've caused, sporting bags of electronic goodies and blank looks. It won't be the last time. Over the coming weeks the boys rapidly attain minor celebrity status.

In the afternoon we lead tours of the campus. Some kids are old hands (one Kazakh has been here four times before) but for most the sight of the laundry room sends them into reveries of panic. Institutionalism starts to catch up with me too, and I am starving hungry exactly fifteen minutes before our 7 o'clock dinner. Afterwards, at the welcome meeting, Centre Manager Jo puts the ! into the Summer in England! with a kick-ass intro to camp life: 'If I see you hit someone, I hit you' - with accompanying mime. They get the point.

Tuesday 4th July

First lessons today, and I am teaching two mid-intermediate homestay classes on their first trip to the Newlands Park campus. Although there are a lot of Spanish I also teach students from Portugal, France, Italy, Austria, Latvia, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the U.S.A. We play the usual round of personalised noughts and crosses, backs

to the board, and find someone who. One conscientious Spanish boy tells me he wants to learn 'complex vocabulary' and the passive tense. The classroom is boiling and I try not to sweat in reply. The course is comprised mainly of skills work to avoid textbook material the students might see at home, but I agree to do something for him.

Wednesday 5th July

Two words that strike fear into the heart of every teacher: PAPER JAM. Surely the greater the number of photocopies, the better the lesson? During orientation day we were encouraged to use dictation, and it saves brains as well as trees. Techniques like dictating a list for students to decipher the connection between the words become mainstays of my newly OHP-ed, pen-and-paper lessons.

After classes the homestay students head up on buses to Covent Garden, London. We have to hurry them across the West End, oblivious to road safety rules as taxi drivers beep from roaring cars at the students overflowing into the road. Awwab and Alhusain splash out on trainers and TVs. Most kids come with more money than the teachers make for the entire summer, and the staff head, instead, for the cheapest coffee bar.

Thursday 6th July

The joy of summer school is the Topic Lesson Book, which equates to diamond dial-a-plan. Given the freedom to choose any lesson on one of the set topics, I teach a lesson I have done five times before, twice over. Fractious French kids reflect my mood, asking each other loudly 'Are you bored? I'm bored'. My enthusiastic Spaniard makes a request for dependent prepositions.

In the afternoon I raise the challenge and find the kids rise to it, better behaved and stimulated. It's easy to believe that they are here to pursue romance and improve their volleyball technique, but many are very motivated in class and all of them appreciate a challenge.

This evening I have 4 hours of disco duty. We patrol doors to prevent students from the other on-site language school coming in and boogie in the disco to give the students something to aim for, or not

Friday 7th July

This evening I have 4 hours of disco duty. We patrol doors to prevent students from the other on-site language school coming in and boogie in the disco to give the students something to aim for, or not. Policing the grounds for those taking greater advantage of the party atmosphere, we find teenage couples kissing (horizontally) on the grass. It's easier to turn a blind eye but we are in loco parentis and have to quell the budding

romances. It's a strange role to be dancing together one minute, reasoning over sexual relations the next, and teacher-student again in the morning.

Saturday 8th July

Cambridge. The bus drivers compete for times, but we all get there alive within a couple of hours, armed with 120 sandwich boxes for hungry kids. Most eat theirs the moment they get off the bus, and then we march into town. Cambridge hardly seems big enough to absorb the number of summer language schools, but mercifully the Newlands Park dudes have yellow bags to help us identify them. We give the kids directions, and a couple of hours' free time to explore, and then we head in the direction of a punt. A young student punts three of us up and down the Cam in the sunshine, pure holiday.

Monday 10th July

The Bronx hits Newlands Park. Over the weekend, some of the students get caught with drugs and the Georgians are overheard with a host of stories to back up the evidence. On Monday evening they go to the hall for a surprise and instead walk into Jo giving them an earful about respect. They are sent to their rooms immediately afterwards, the majority enduring the punishment for the few. Three French boys are sent home for dealing, and the Georgian group loses all excursion privileges for a week.

Wednesday 12th July

A day off. I escape to Oxford in the car, and relish wearing normal clothes and spending my hard-earned cash on good coffee and M&S nibbles.

Early evening, the transvestites come out to play: girls in gangsta chic, guys dressed to the nines with high heels and lippie. I join the others for the opening ceremony of the Cross-Dressing Night. Gavin and the Activity Leaders do a great job camping it up for the kids. We are reminded of Butlins and creep back to the safety of our rooms before we're recruited as Redcoats.

Friday 15th July

By Friday afternoon all the teachers are feeling the strain. We plan a 'Hunt the Teacher' activity based on Find Someone Who. We spread out around the grounds and students come to find us in small groups to work out which of their list of statements applies to each teacher. Most take one look at me and (correctly) discount 'once ran a marathon'; a surprising number guess that I speak a little Chinese although are less impressed when I try to prove it. Apparently, the number of years I spend teaching language is inversely proportional to my success in actually learning one.

Monday 18th July

It is hard to draw breath in the sweltering classroom and I take my class outside to avoid heat stroke. It is increasingly hard to maintain control when you are surrounded by trees, not to mention other groups. Some students instinctively light up

cigarettes as soon as they leave class; others loll languidly against trees or spread eagle on the grass and have to be reminded that they are still in lessons.

Thursday 21st July

It's the end of Week 3 and we are at our busiest. All the classes are full (16 students max), observations are in full flow and overwhelmed with paperwork, I cause havoc by losing my register.

We resort, collectively, to the Print Poetry lesson marketed by our ADoS, Tiziana, also known as the cut-up-the-newspaper class; each group of students is given a selection of newspapers and five minutes to cut out as many words as they can on a topic of their choice. After that time they are challenged to create a free form poem using the words they have chosen. The students produce great posters for their classroom, and poems on topics like the World Cup, global violence, and concepts of beauty. I am impressed.

Tuesday 26th July

I haven't had much time to plan and in desperation I wing it with a version of Spin the Bottle where the students write a mixture of questions on music and crazy forfeits. Half an hour later they're begging for another round, and I've got my next lesson sorted.

In the afternoon we lead a trip to the British Museum. The teachers rotate guard duty outside the museum to check that errant teens do not escape in pursuit of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll on the streets of Bloomsbury. Despite the hawk eyes, some Spanish girls escape and go fashion shopping. Others, however, will be able to tell their parents all about the Elgin Marbles and the role of calligraphy in Arab poetry. Let's see who had the better afternoon.

Friday 29th July

This weekend I, and a lot of the kids, are leaving, and Gavin, head of fun, prepares a surprise water fight. A hundred teens dash in and out of the pavilion splashing ice-cold water into balloons, buckets and bottles and create watery war on the sports field. The craftier ones wait for people leaving by side doors, then give them an unexpected shower. The teacher/pupil relationship is worn away by the need to stay dry and defend myself.

Afterwards we all pile into the lecture theatre for the goodbye ceremony and presentation of certificates. I learn how socially unacceptable it is to kiss a Russian on each cheek, the hard way; why does no-one ever tell you these things, and why oh why don't we choose an international kissing standard? The teacher-pupil relationship has never been so ill-defined.

Jo and Gavin have prepared a photo slide show of memorable moments from the last weeks. I look back with fondness over my summer memories, and prepare for a suitable dose of emotion, when Gavin stops the slide show on a larger-than-life photo of me at the water fight. I am standing grinning with a water balloon, but completely unbeknownst to me there is an evil teen behind me, about to empty a huge bucket of water over my head. And if this isn't enough, I have an odd wet patch in the groin area. Leave on a high note, I say.

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of students



In 2003 Nicky Yeeles went to a small language school in rural China with plans to stay in TEFL for 6 months. Two and a half years later she is still enjoying the challenge! She has taught at IH Braga (Portugal) and IH Riga (Latvia), and is now at IH Bielsko-Biala in Southern Poland



BOOKS BY IH TEACHERS

The Chinese Classroom by Katy Fu

Editor

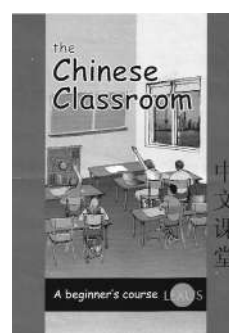
“The Chinese Classroom” by Katy Fu, a teacher of Chinese at IH London, has just been published. It is about learning Chinese (Mandarin) and is designed for students to use for self-study. However, it can also be used by a teacher for supplementary material. The inspiration for the book came from Katy’s own experience working with current published materials:

‘I found most Chinese books for foreign students are not designed for easy learning and there is a lack of methodology for the students to follow. After years of teaching foreign students to speak Chinese, I have developed an efficient way or “an easier and fun way” to learn Chinese. This is based on the sentence’s structure, building and expanding your sentences by changing the vocabulary, thus students can close the book and make their own sentences easily. Also I stressed the “get talking” element, which frees the students from any speech inhibitions’.

Katy contacted a publisher with the idea and they showed great interest. After almost two years of hard work, the book is finally on the market. The biggest challenges Katy faced when writing the book were remaining patient during the writing process and approaching the material from the students point

of view, considering the problems that arise when learning Chinese. Katy notes: ‘I decided not to make the text too dry and tried to keep it contemporary and have a fun element, so the students would not lose interest.’

The most enjoyable part of the project was seeing her hard work finally become a real product. Katy is keen to write a follow up book, which focuses on Chinese characters (Hanzi). We wish her all the best with her new project and hope to include a review of ‘The Chinese Classroom’ in Issue 23.



“Kallimni Arabi” – a new series of books for teaching Arabic from IH Cairo

IH Cairo

Although more than 360 million native Arabic speakers know this, the fact that written Arabic and spoken Arabic are almost two separate languages is not necessarily known by the rest of the world. Then, of course, written Arabic goes from right to left (which is pretty good for left-handed people... think about it?!) and ranges from the old and traditional (a sort of Shakespeare-equivalent) to what is known as Modern Standard Arabic, the current written language used by educated Arabic speakers, the media and newspapers. Then you can throw into the pot the fact that whichever Middle Eastern country you visit the locals will tell that their form of spoken Arabic is actually the purest and best Arabic. (How many times have we all heard that in our different languages!). So, when you put all this together it makes Arabic a bit tricky, but definitely interesting!

Nowadays, International Language Institute (IH Cairo) is a dedicated Modern Languages school teaching Arabic to a very wide range of customers from an average of some 30 countries. Around 200-250 full-time students come and stay for anything from a month up to a year from universities, the military, foreign ministries, the media, business and industry, Ministries of Education in Asia, and lots of individuals from all walks of life, including archeologists and Egyptologists. The tricky bit for us is not the teaching, looking after them, numerous airport meets and finding appropriate hotels or furnished accommodation but actually finding decent text books to support our students. Quite frankly, although Arabic is rated as a foremost language these days, what we would all

consider to be ‘normal language materials’ (books, CDs and DVDs) hardly exist. Forget self study and on-line, there is very little out there.

So, two years ago we made a serious decision (and it’s a big commitment) to write and develop our own books for ECA (Egyptian Spoken Arabic) and MSA (Modern Standard Arabic). Our first book will actually come out next month, published by the American University Press in Cairo and they already have a further two books from us. By the end of this month, a fourth book will be ready to roll out as soon as they can do it. Our author is Samia Louis, an exceptionally talented and creative teacher who has worked for us for many years and somehow has managed to stay focused and dedicated to the project. Everyone who has ever tried to write a book knows it takes a lot of mental will-power (and patience with publishers!) to remain focused and make it happen. We felt it was time for an IH-style series of Arabic books, not only for our own students but for anyone learning Arabic anywhere in the world.

By the time we finish the whole series in two years’ time, there will be a complete set of ECA and MSA course books with CDs, and by then we will be working on supplementary materials, teacher’s resources. We will probably discover that we have to review and up-date everything! That’s the way it goes. However, for our school it’s been more than worthwhile and has involved not just Samia, but lots of other teachers. It has made them really think about what they do, the materials they use and how to make the courses they teach that much better for the students.

IH WORLD NEWS

Michael Carrier, Executive Director, IHWO

IH Growth

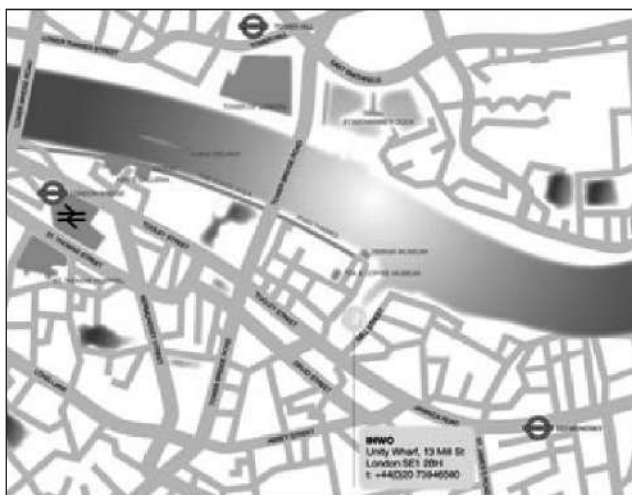
The IH network continues to grow steadily as we identify new high-quality schools around the world. We are now 140 schools in 46 countries, and aim to be 150 schools by the end of 2007. We hope to hit the highpoint of 50 countries very shortly.

New schools joining the IH family recently include

- Mexico – IH Queretaro
- Colombia – IH Bogota
- UK – IH Salisbury
- UK - IH Belfast

IH World office

We have moved from 106 Piccadilly to a new office in the old warehouse district next to Tower Bridge, near the banks of the Thames – see our website for new address and new phone numbers. Our email address remains the same. You can download a map and directions if you would like to come and visit us.



IH London has also now completed its move to Stukeley St, a brand new school in Covent Garden. It's modern and beautifully designed – you can find details on their website at www.ihlondon.com

Our old home at 106 Piccadilly still has links with IH. The building has been taken over by Limkokwing University, the parent institution of IH Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

Limkokwing is developing a global degree program linked with its campus in Cyberjaya, Malaysia and with its partner campuses worldwide. You can find more information here: http://www.limkokwing.edu.my/v6/academic/london_intro.asp

IH Resources

We now have a new **Language Resource Centre** for Modern Language teachers. There is a Coordinator for each of the 8 main languages, who are building a teacher community for their language and sharing resources.

Visit it at: www.ihlanguages.org

All IH teachers have access to the main IH World website (please ask your DOS or Director if you need an ID) and can download materials and resources. Here's a sample screen of the Resource Centre:



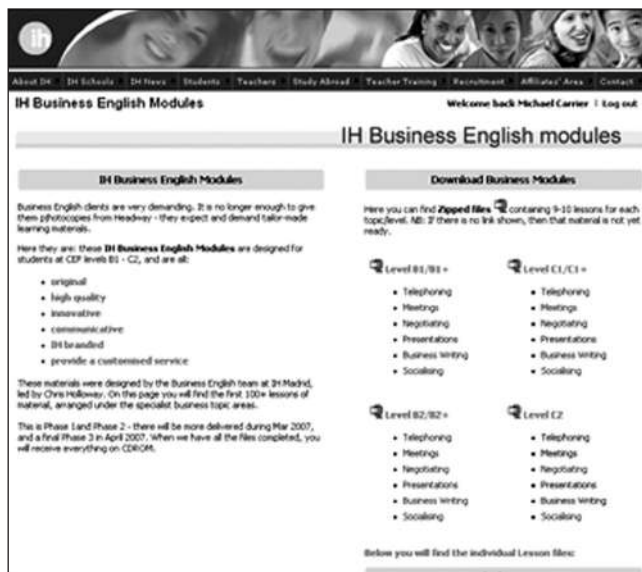
Language for Special Purposes

A further batch of high-quality Business English materials have been published and are now available on the IH World website.

These materials – 180 hours so far – have been written by the experienced and creative staff at IH Madrid, led by Chris Holloway. The materials are available at 4 different levels, and address students' needs over 8 topic areas, including Telephoning, Meetings and Socialising.

The first modules of **English for Vocational Training**, developed by teachers in IH Riga, are being edited for publication and will be on the IH World website by the end of April.

The next course to be published will be **English for Journalists**, written by the specialist team at IH Belgrade, and scheduled for the end of 2007.



IH Teacher training

In the last year we have continued to launch new teacher development courses, all of which are now available on CDROM. IH BET and IH 121 were launched in 2006, and the **IH TKT** preparation course is also available from April 2, 2007, on CDROM.

The **IH TKT** course provides schools with all the training material and tutor notes they need to offer a 25 hour face-

to-face course to prepare trainees for the CambridgeESOL TKT exam. An online version of this course will be available in summer 2007.

IH COLT

The IH COLT training course for teachers who want to teach online has been a great success, and is now being run regularly for IH teachers and staff from other institutions. The course is now available for schools who want to run it with their own trainers, and can be purchased on CDROM for uploading into a school's online learning environment, or the school can rent space on the IH online platform.

IH World is also running the IH COLT course for individual enrolment. The next courses are scheduled for:

October 2007

January 2008

The cost of the course, per participant, is £275. For IH school staff, however, it is reduced to only £125.

IH Study Abroad

Don't forget to visit our website for promotional materials, and download our CDROM – watch out for DVD trailers on www.ihstudyabroad.com.

IH Club

We have sent out the first of the regular newsletters to the IH Club membership. IH Club is an alumnus club for current and former students of IH – a way to keep in touch with their old school and learn about new developments. Please promote this to your students – it is free to sign up for at www.ihworld.com/ihclub

| Event | Date | Location |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| IH Director's Conference | May 5 - May 8, 2007 | Prague |
| IH Y L Conference | Nov 22 - Nov 24, 2007 | IH Torres Vedras, Portugal |
| IH DOS Conference 2008 | Jan 3 - Jan 5, 2008 | London |

Calendar of IH events 2007

Michael Carrier

Executive Director

International House World Organisation

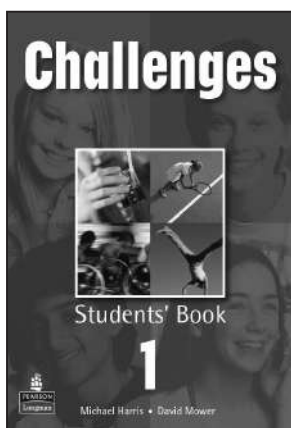
michael.carrier@ihworld.co.uk

BOOK REVIEWS

Challenges 1

Michael Harris and David Mower

Pearson Longman, 2007



Exuberant, lively, colourful, emotional, full of promises and potential – this is today's teenager. Challenges 1 successfully adopts these characteristics in order to meet with its target audience on a similar wavelength.

The Challenge 1 package consists of a student's book, a workbook with a CD-ROM, three class CDs, three class tapes and a video.

The student's book topics relate to young adults' interests, ranging from sports, to risks, television and teams.

In the ten units famous people, international events, blockbuster movies as well as other real and current items are used in an attempt to reach out to the teenagers' internal search for reality in their lives. The aims of the language and skills are presented clearly and in detail in the content pages as well as throughout the units, which are consistent in their format to provide students with the organization they strive for.

The coursebook is rich in colorful pictures, which are the basis for new lexis and grammar work. The target language is intensely supported with controlled practice, pronunciation focus, and listening tasks. The speaking activities are target language-oriented, challenging and competitive. However, some further expansion by the teacher might be found necessary. Grammatical forms are abundant in forms

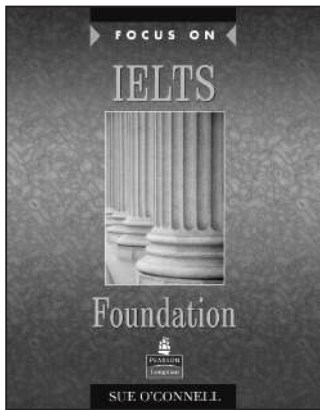
of tables for students to complete but no rules are found in the book. Due to the gap between the context and the grammatical form table, students will need the help of the teacher in linking the two to understand the target language's functional meaning.

The authors of Challenges 1 highly expose the learners to the skills of reading and listening through authentic materials. The strengthening of these skills is highly important in the teenager's preparation for university life. As for the writing skill, it is mostly dealt with in a realistic way, covering types of things students would write in their every day and school lives, such as notes, emails, postcards, and reports. To further interest the students and enhance their teamwork ability, every other unit consists of a 'project' task, which substitutes the writing tasks. Those include designing leaflets and posters about different topics. Both the writing tasks and the projects aim at creating a student portfolio, in which they include their class work.

As mentioned above, Challenges 1 adopts the target readers' characteristics. As adults who have already gone through our teenage years (no need to mention how long ago that was!) we are all familiar with the desire to be independent. Well, the coursebook provides students with this opportunity in a variety of ways. Each unit is followed by a 'study help' section, in which students can independently work on revision exercises and they are even referred to corresponding pages to understand their errors! At the end of the book, there is also a 'Time Out' section which consists of jokes, guessing games, crosswords, matching exercises, and other tasks for students to enjoy on their own or with a study group. A picture dictionary ensures a visual aid for the understanding of lexis.

A book full of life, energy and knowledge, Challenges 1 meets the needs of our teenagers today and gives them the opportunity to grasp the English language in a fun and interactive way. Try it!

Reviewed by Nayla Habr, IH Jounieh



**Focus on IELTS –
Foundation**
Sue O'Connell
Pearson Longman, 2006

As an IELTS examiner and a teacher who often has to run IELTS preparation classes, I was quite excited to be asked to review an IELTS preparation book. My experience has shown that IELTS preparation coursebooks are very dry and uninspiring and generally consist of past exam questions and if you are lucky some tips on how to deal with the different sections. This of course leaves the teacher with the task of figuring out how to jazz up the IELTS preparation lessons.

Focus on IELTS Foundation is definitely a breath of fresh air. The layout of the book is user-friendly and the topics are common topics found in the IELTS exam. Most units cover the four areas tested on the IELTS exam: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Each unit also has a grammar focus specifically chosen for the IELTS exam. For example, Unit 1 deals with the present simple which is particularly useful for Part 1 of the speaking exam where candidates have to talk about their day-to-day lives.

Throughout the book there are exam link boxes explaining why a particular piece of grammar or skill is needed. After every unit there is an IELTS vocabulary builder to work on common problem areas such as word families and prepositions. At the end of every second unit there is an academic word study and review section based on the Academic Word List (AWL) of which there is a full list towards the back of the book. When you consider that *grammatical range and accuracy* and *lexical resource* are two marking criteria for both the speaking and writing sections of the exam, you can see just how relevant these sections are.

The writing sections of each unit tend to focus on the different skills needed as well as the different layouts for different types of essays. I would like to have seen more exercises as I feel that the ones that are there don't go deep enough. On the plus side, there is a writing bank at the back of the book with model answers, which can be analysed. This is especially important for Task 1, which is very formulaic and can be taught as such.

The reading sections also tend to deal with the skills needed to pass the reading section. For example: skimming, scanning and identifying the topic of the paragraph. The exam links give very clear pieces of advice to the students and teachers who are new at teaching IELTS will also find them useful. I like the fact that students are given practice in the types of questions found in the exam.

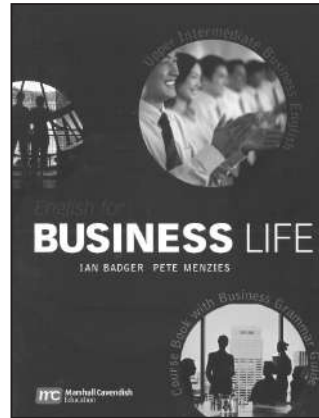
The listening sections follow the same pattern as the writing and reading: the first few units deal with various skills needed such as identifying numbers and isolating sounds and then move on to the types of questions found in the exam.

The speaking sections follow the format of the speaking exam and the grammar focuses deal with the grammar needed at each stage. For example, present simple in the beginning to talk about day-to-day life and moving to more complex grammar such as conditionals which is needed when discussing more abstract concepts in the second and third stages of the speaking exam.

The question remains: 'Would I use this book for my IELTS preparation classes?' The answer is a resounding 'Yes.' Everything one needs to prepare students for the IELTS is in the book. The exam focus tips are excellent, although it would have to be

supplemented with additional exercises, as I do not think there are sufficient in this coursebook. However, I do have one concern: there aren't any complete IELTS practice tests in the book and for people preparing for the exam independently, this is a problem. I'm assuming the Teacher's Book and CD has complete practice tests. Perhaps future editions of this coursebook could incorporate practice tests.

Reviewed by Colin Michell, IH Johannesburg



**English For Business Life:
Upper Intermediate**
Ian Badger, Pete Menzies
Marshall Cavendish 2007

English For Business Life is a brand new four-level business series to come onto the market, upper intermediate being the top level and equivalent to CEF C1 – C2 or BEC Higher. It's worth checking the back cover of the course book to see the exact CEF level as I feel the named book levels

can be misleading. Each level consists of a coursebook with CDs, a self-study guide with CDs and a trainer's manual. The authors have backgrounds in business and professional development and language training.

A particularly useful feature of this series is the three-layered pathway through the coursebooks, which gives teachers the flexibility to use it on courses of different lengths or with students with different requirements. Students on a short course or who need less consolidation can work on the Fast track and cover the basic contents in approximately 45 hours, those who have more time can follow the Standard track which gives them more practice activities and guided use of the Self-Study Guide over 60 hours and students on longer courses can follow the Comprehensive track over about 90 hours.

The upper intermediate coursebook offers 30 shortish units, audioscripts, a grammar and language index and a very useful glossary of business-related terms. Tucked into the back cover there is also an excellent Business Grammar Guide booklet with explanations of all the points included in the coursebook, using only examples from business contexts, plus the answer key. The book is visually tasteful, easy to follow and includes a comprehensive map of the book detailing expressions, grammar and themes of each unit.

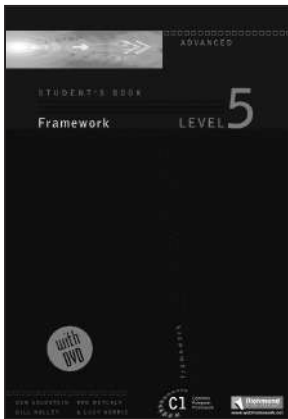
The coursebook follows a grammatical syllabus and the bulk of the course covers useful areas common to most business environments such as 'Business Travel' or 'Customer Care' with individual units being dedicated to specific fields such as 'Taxation', 'Advertising and Promotion', 'Legal Matters' etc, which can be used to dip into in conjunction with other more specific courses. I especially like the fact that the book includes original topics such as 'Work/Life Balance' or 'Company Culture and Values'. The units are uniform and brief and based around useful phrases/exchanges, practice of a specific grammar point, and some skills work, all related to the topic in hand.

The Self-Study Guide is envisaged as a stand-alone self-study course or as a supplement to the coursebook and includes some study tips at the front. Each unit has work on useful phrases/exchanges along with a listening activity, cross references to the Business Grammar Section at the back (same as in the coursebook) and around four grammar exercises and a vocabulary exercise. Also at the back are the answers and the audio scripts. I love the idea of a Self-Study Guide but

feel that in this case it is more suited to a student with a lot of prior knowledge, as the units tend to be rather sparse.

All in all, to me the advantages of this book are its clarity and ease of use and the originality and currentness of many of its topics (Fat Cats, ID Theft). There are entertaining authentic materials (Quizzes: How Do You Treat Your Colleagues? Say Yes Too Often? - You Need Time Manager) plus authentic texts offering real business advice (Networking Tips, Advanced Project Management) which provide good springboards for discussion. My only reservation is that even on the Comprehensive track, for an average or below average student the teacher will need to add in quite a lot of supplementary practice, as the units are so short. Even so, for me it's a book well worth having and I will certainly be using it in the future.

Reviewed by Helen Rouse, IH Malaga



Framework Advanced
Goldstein, Metcalf, Holley & Norris
Richmond Publishing, 2006

Coursebooks often get a bad deal. As teachers we often tend to look at them and think to ourselves "What on earth am I supposed to do with that?" when confronted by some particularly random task or obtuse activity. Mario

Rinoluceri' describes "the soft, fudgey, sub-journalistic, woman's magazine world of EFLese course materials" and I was expecting Framework to follow on in a similar vein.

Flicking through the student book, it became apparent that this book is a deliberate move away from the traditional topic areas. Clearly aimed at a teenage and young adult market, attitudes to religion, relationships and death are explored as well as visits to graffiti-ridden New York, the favelas of Sao Paolo and the townships of Soweto. *Framework* does not shy away from contentious issues, instead it simply presents the debate and lets the students get on with it.

One aspect that I particularly like is that there is a high degree of authenticity of language running through the book. Texts, whether reading or listening, are used as a vehicle for the presentation of language, but not in the contrived 'which form of the conditional did you hear?' way that is often common to coursebooks. In *Framework*, texts are used to present authentic use of the language before the students grapple further with the target structures. Noticing and inductive processing of the language are key features of the book and interestingly, *Framework* makes use of contrastive analysis and translation into L1.

There is certainly a lot there to keep both students and teachers busy throughout their course. There is an additional Workbook with a more specific focus on grammar and lexical practice activities, which also includes a CD-ROM that contains further practice activities, a Collins Co-build dictionary and End of Unit Tests. There is a DVD which has a series of five minute authentic Reuters' news reports on topics that correspond to the unit topics and crop up in the Students' Book as 'World English' sections every two units or so. These are definitely 'World English'; contributions from NYPD detectives and Filipino ballroom dancers ensure not only a rich and authentic use of language, but exposure to alternative models of pronunciation, a move away from the 'RP' model that tends to dominate the profession. The Reference Guide provides a grammar reference (again with additional practice exercises), a vocabulary reference (with phonemic transcription and a space for translation to L1) and contains transcripts for all the listenings and DVD segments. If students

are pleased with all this variety, teachers will be heartened to note the inclusion of a resource book with additional activities and an exam section focused on the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Perhaps the biggest driving force behind *Framework* (and possibly the inspiration for the name?) is the Common European Framework. The CEF has provided the basis for the syllabus behind the book and is reflected in the 'Language Passport' sections of the Workbook: a series of 'can do' statements that students tick off as they achieve them. More importantly, it also provides teachers with a very clear set of learning goals. The teacher's book lists CEF objectives for each unit and relates them to the material provided in each unit. This is very useful as it allows us to ensure we meet the goals, regardless of how much or how little we choose to use from the book itself.

One of the two main criticisms I have of *Framework* is that there is no overt work on pronunciation, beyond a phonemic chart and phonemic transcription of the vocabulary in the reference guide. Perhaps it is assumed that at Advanced level, students don't need to focus on this as much.

The second issue is regarding the 'practice' that students get. Within each unit, students are occasionally referred to the back of the book for 'Language Practice Activities'. These turn out to be the standard array of gap-fill, deletion, addition or matching tasks. Unless I'm missing something fairly obvious, productive practice activities seem to be rather thin on the ground. Every now and again writing tasks are slotted in at the end of each section and could be done in class, but seem rather to be intended for homework tasks. There are of course the contents of the resource book but these are billed as 'additional', are not referred to in the teachers' book lesson plans and don't always completely correspond to the component of the student book being focused on. This is an odd and somewhat startling omission.

Despite this, I feel that *Framework* is a useful addition to the school resource library. It certainly has more than enough to occupy everyone for the 100 hours or so of classroom time it is intended for. It has made a clear attempt to engage students on a variety of "Real World" themes and to provide communicative opportunities. *Framework* has tried hard to provide something new and stimulating for the classroom and on the whole it succeeds. Definitely worth having a look at.

Reviewed by David Petrie, IH Coimbra / Santa Clara

'Rinoluceri, M. (1999). The UK, EFLese sub-culture and dialect. In Folio, 5, 2, 12-14.



Quick Smart English
Intermediate
Ken Wilson and Mary Tomalin
Brookmead English
Language Teaching, 2006

Quick Smart English Intermediate is the third book from a smartly designed series aiming at quickly preparing for various tests at B1/B2 levels. This book is already aiming at FCE level, so don't get misled by the 'Intermediate' in the title.

Although the authors claim the book hasn't been designed to be a specific exam-preparation course, it turns out to be planned with various exams in mind: Trinity College, London GESE, ISE exams and FCE. A very ambitious plan had to result in an abundance of materials.

The book is composed of the regular set (a student's book with a CD,

a workbook and a teacher's book) which provides a huge amount of language material to choose from, depending which exam your students plan to take. The teacher's book gives extensive comments as to how to use each part of the unit, as well as providing lots of background information dealing with cross cultural aspects and Internet references. It is hard to imagine that teachers will be able to use all the material within a 70-90 hour course. One has to be very selective.

The Teacher's Book is definitely a treasure for the teacher, especially those new to the job, as it guides you through the way the exercises are to be done analyzing reasons for this communicative approach and providing various alternative ideas. It has plenty of photocopiable material: additional grammar pages, FCE exam practice and quick tests for each unit.

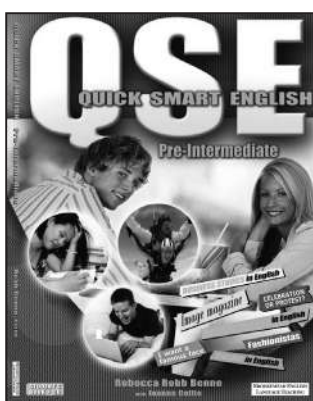
The Student's Book has 18 units. They each follow the same pattern and some students might find this repetitive after a while. On the other hand they should appreciate this as easy navigation for reference and revision before the exam. Additionally they will gladly use the language bank on the inside covers with tables of very useful functional expressions. What should appeal to both the teachers and students is the fact that the majority of the photos don't just illustrate the topic; there is a story behind them. This must be much more stimulating for the discussion both in the *Preview* and the *Talk about it* parts.

The course is generally aiming to teach English through researching various subjects. The section on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is the best example. Not only fluency in speaking has been promoted here; regular writing practice is gradually introduced in each unit. What the teacher will surely appreciate are the models answers for each task. The thing students might miss, however, is a writing bank in their books.

What comes as the biggest surprise in this course is the Workbook since it turns out to be the only source of grammar revision in this set. Students have to buy it as it includes both the tables with examples/rules as well as *written* restricted practice. It is also a valuable source of vocabulary work that you won't find in the students book.

Although the authors advise the teachers to encourage their students to use the functional language and vocabulary during fluency parts, the thing most teachers will find problematic is lack of ideas for restricted oral practice for the function/grammar and vocabulary sections. If you do not think you will find this a problem, have a look at the course as it has a lot to offer.

Reviewed by Barbara Wozniak, IH Krakow



Quick Smart English Pre-Intermediate
Rebecca Robb Benne with
Joanne Collie
Brookmead English
Language Teaching, 2006

Nice, colourful pages and photos, short units to avoid overdoing a topic, a novel alternative slant to each topic and tasks geared towards becoming familiar with PET exam-type questions. *Quick Smart English Pre-Intermediate* tries to achieve a lot within the parameters of a course book for the pre-intermediate student.

QSE introduces a fresh angle on the usual topics of sports, shopping, and festivals etc. by looking at, for example, the dangers of sports or being ripped off by pushy shop assistants. Both students and teachers will like this, as my students did, as well as the useful vocabulary for day-to-day language that it introduces. The units are also shorter than normal to avoid

boredom with a given topic i.e. the 'Oh no, not more on the environment' syndrome. However, teachers will have to supplement with more material, as there are not enough units to fill an academic year. It's difficult to imagine a unit lasting more than two lessons without a lot of supplementing. The teachers' guide gives teachers a list of websites for extra material on each unit but little more than this, which is useful but perhaps time-consuming for the busy teacher.

In terms of presentation, the layout of the book and workbook can be problematic for the teacher and student. Grammar is thin and the explanations and practice exercises are concentrated mostly in the workbook. This is a big problem for those IH schools that use IH Online Campus instead of a workbook. There is also quite limited guidance on grammar, especially for the Lower Intermediate learner. A lot of the grammar points seem to be skimmed over and there can be a vocabulary overload at times.

Pronunciation is not covered at all in the student's book and although the teacher's guide has some pronunciation exercises in the Quick Smart tests, the phonetic chart isn't used at all, thus, unfortunately, missing out on an efficient way to illustrate different sounds.

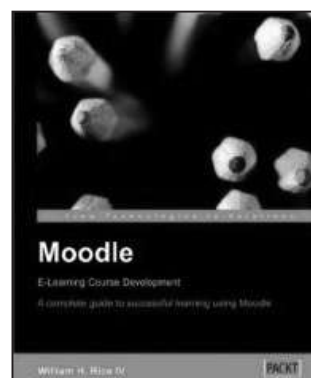
Tape scripts for the listening activities are located in the workbook (again a problem for users of IH Campus) regardless of whether they are student's book or workbook activities. The audio tracks are split over two CDs even if both tracks refer to the student's book. However, the listening activities themselves can be quite interesting and relevant to modern life.

A lot of effort is made to familiarise students with PET style questions and tasks. While it is good to prepare students for exam-type tasks, I feel PET may be ambitious for the Pre-Intermediate level, as they will not yet have acquired the grammar or vocabulary to exploit these materials, let alone attempt the exam. I found the practice tests in the teachers guide useful in preparing my intermediate students for PET.

Each unit in the book has a writing task on the topic, which I found very useful for allocating as written assignments and the discussion topics throughout the units provided students with some good vocabulary and guided discussion.

To summarise, in my opinion *QSE* is quick but not very smart. It's very light on grammar and is in short supply of guidance and practice. The same can be said for pronunciation. In terms of skills practice *QSE* provides an interesting slant on topics, and the new vocabulary and productive skills are well exploited so *QSE* could provide teachers with some good supplementary skills practice to add to their regular syllabus.

Reviewed by Martin Keon, IH Palermo



William H. Rice IV (2006)
Moodle: E-Learning Course Development: A complete guide to successful learning using Moodle. Packt Publishing: Birmingham – Mumbai

For those who have not come across this M-word before, Moodle is an Open Source content management system. Open Source means that anyone can use Moodle for personal, educational or commercial purposes free of charge. Unlike licensed VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), such as WebCT or Blackboard, Moodle was developed by teachers for teachers, and therefore its tools and features are intuitive to use in course design. Moodle's educational philosophy is grounded in social-constructivist pedagogy with its central idea that we are all engaged in the process of constructing knowledge through interaction with content and other learners. It is this pedagogy as well as the recent Web 2.0 revolution

in user generated content and collaborative knowledge creation that inspired Moodle developers to integrate existing social tools, such as Wiki, Forum, Workshop and Blog into their VLE.

When I first started developing e-Learning courses about 18 months ago, everyone seemed to be talking about Moodle. Someone helped me to install it on my home computer and I was looking for a short accessible manual to get me started. That was when *Moodle: E-Learning Course Development* by William H. Rice IV fell into my hands. I duly skipped the Introduction and the first chapter on Installing and Configuring Moodle, and went straight for Chapter 3 on Creating Categories and Courses, and the following chapters on adding course materials. A couple of hours later I had designed a fairly decent Quiz, set up a Forum and a Wiki, populated a Glossary, composed a Web Page, and uploaded a variety of resources, such as images, documents and video clips into my Moodle course. All I needed now was some real students!

As it says in the Preface, this book will guide you through the installation and configuration of your Moodle site, from setting up a course, populating it with content and activities suitable for your group of learners and desired learning outcomes, to enrolling users and maintaining and customising your course. The target audience of *Moodle: E-Learning Course Development* is any educator or developer, from a single Moodle enthusiast who wants to set up and run their own independent Moodle site, to teachers and course developers using a centrally supported and maintained Moodle site at their institution or department. However, I felt that the author assumed some knowledge which some educators and course developers without a background in IT might not have, such as familiarity with programming languages (HTML, php), file formats (SQL), databases, etc.

One of the main criticisms I had was that *Moodle: E-learning Course Development* seems a bit sketchy on e-Learning pedagogy. I found that it is more about course settings, development and maintenance than course delivery. There is very little in the book about motivating your students, e-Moderation skills, challenges of Blended or Distance learning mode and other issues of course delivery. Possibly, the explanation lies in the background of William H. Rice IV who is 'a training manager, a technical writer, and a knowledge manager', rather than an educator. A curious fact about the author is that when not working he 'enjoys foraging for edible wild plants in New York City parks'. This certainly explains most of the examples he chose to include in the book, with such gems as Wild Plants Chatroom, Dissect a Flower Online, and Basic Botany for Foragers Wiki.

Another thing to watch out for is that when the book went to print, Moodle 1.5 was the current version. Since then, the names of some tools have changed and some new activities have been added. Now version 1.7 has recently been released and 1.8 will be available in summer 2007.

On balance, if you are someone who is a typical 'early adopter', IT confident and looking to launch a standalone experimental e-Learning course, you will find this book one of the best guides to Moodle. It even has a useful checklist of the main stages, from installation to maintenance, at the back of the book. For those who are interested to find out more about teaching with Moodle I would also recommend http://docs.moodle.org/en/Teacher_documentation for a wide range of documents, Moodle tools demos, teacher and student FAQs, teaching tips, tricks and do's and don'ts, with more of an emphasis on pedagogy.

Reviewed by Lisa Carrier



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