CREATIVITY
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

**EDITED BY DANIEL XERRI
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AFTERWORD BY LUKE MEDDINGS**

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There's a wealth of talent that lies in all of us.
All of us, including those who work in schools,
must nurture creativity systematically
and not kill it unwittingly.

Ken Robinson

This book is dedicated to all
creative ELT professionals.

Contents

Foreword

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WHY DO WE NEED ANOTHER BOOK ABOUT CREATIVITY?

We need another book because questions about creative language teaching are re-ignited by every teacher in every classroom in every country. Each time a language teacher enters a class, a silent experiment in hope and creativity is taking place: hope that the lesson will make a difference to at least one of its learners in some way; creativity in that teachers strive to give the lesson something of their own that goes beyond imitation or compliance. The teachers who describe their last lesson with a sparkle in their eye, rarely describe the joys of "doing what they are told" by the course book or the test paper. Instead they describe a sense of doing something of worth, and making a difference to their learners (Bell, 1995; Johnstone, 2009; Tsui, 2009). This is why we will never run out of the need for teachers to tell us their stories about what they did, why, and how they know it worked. The more specific and concrete we are with our stories of classrooms, the more it seems to tap into common and universal professional questions. This is one of the interesting mysteries of sharing professional stories. Compare, for example, a "broad brush" manifesto telling us that teaching a song works better than drilling a grammar point; and then, a teacher's diary account of a grammar lesson which "bombed", and was saved by turning it into a songwriting lesson in which each group planned, wrote and performed a rap chant (as in Appel, 1995). The teacher's narrative takes us on a journey of discovery, ignites empathy, offers a strategy for turning disaster into opportunity. From it, multiple generative principles can be gleaned: meeting learners halfway, working with their interests and going beyond them, taking the creative and giving it structure, turning teaching disaster into gold. In contrast, imperatives, and lists of principles, however worthy, simply cannot give us this richness; and they are to be read and taken on trust that somewhere, for some teacher, they worked. This is why we need teachers to tell us their stories, and in discovering what is different about each of them, discover what is the same.

WHY DOES CREATIVITY MATTER TO LANGUAGE TEACHERS?

It matters now more than ever that these stories from creative teachers are shared. Partly it matters because examination boards, publishers, language policy makers, government advisors and Ministries of Education tell us that it does not

matter, that our priorities must lie elsewhere. Teacher narratives such as Appel (1995) in Germany, Aoki, Sunami, Li and Kinoshita (2004) in Japan, Doecke, Homer and Nixon (2003) in Australia, show teachers generating their own theories of good practice, often in contradiction to those externally imposed. Whilst our own burning debates as professionals cover a wide spectrum including, for example, learner needs, the changing language, multiple literacies, reflective practice, the language-culture interface, the dominant public rhetoric describes education as a deliverable commodity rather like crates of cargo (see the following for examples of the impact of these developments on teachers: Ball, 2003; Bottery, 1996; Malcolm & Zukas, 2002). The more that external agencies are annointed to audit, measure, and quality assure, the less are we trusted to self-regulate, reflect and develop for ourselves: and it is this internal development that gives us a lifetime of growth as educators.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS BOOK?

This book offers resistance to mediocrity and compliance. What is special about this book is its eclectic mix of voices: both esteemed elders and welcome newcomers, teachers engaging with the creative arts, poetry, music, and visual arts; researchers creating connections between real world language and the language we teach. There is the chance to track what a creative approach means to them and to tease out its multiple meanings as interpreted by them. All have their legitimate place, showing that it is possible to mark change in multiple different ways. This book offers examples from advertising, Business English, visual arts, music, and literature. It is a testimony to our profession that it brings together teachers from such an eclectic mix of starting and arrival points. We can, and do, look at our teaching through the lens of psychology, business and management, game theory, language acquisition, sociology, literature, information technology and much more (see my account of this in Spiro, 2013). As this book richly illustrates, we can each find our own particular way to make a difference.

WHAT NEXT FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS? HOW SHOULD WE ENGAGE AS READERS?

What should we do as readers of this eclectic and heartfelt mix of accounts from the lives of language teachers? We can take these papers as examples of professional kinship and diversity; we can relate these papers to our own practice, or identify new questions to be asked of our own classrooms. It is clear that narratives of professional practice do gather an accumulative weight in relation to one another. Importantly, it is the combining of stories that offer a powerful collective voice in response to trends within the profession. By stripping away the specificity of time or place, we can see beyond surface differences and relate to the common values and concerns that drive teachers and make their profession worthwhile.

Thus I commend to you this book as an example of how the same endeavour – caring about teaching – can be approached in multiple and uniquely creative ways. Inside and through the accounts of others, will be some new routes for you too, the reader.

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Preface

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As a high school student in New Zealand in the 1960s, I studied German. The nearest German-speaking community of any extent at that time was in Namibia, some 12,000 kilometres away – a fact I was probably unaware of at the time. In any case, I wasn't expecting to use my German for any practical purposes, like buying a train ticket or a sandwich, in the foreseeable future. Instead, I developed an obsession for German poetry, which seemed to embody not just cultural aspects of German, but its very fibre and essence. I even tried my hand at writing some: my teacher, unimpressed, corrected them as if they were any other composition. I was undeterred: unbeknownst to myself I had chosen to learn German for Creative Purposes. Since then, I have actually managed to buy train tickets and sandwiches using German. But listening to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau singing Schubert's *Winterreise*, I still experience an echo of that initial enchantment.

Sadly, my experience trying to tap into that creative impulse when teaching English was less successful. For a start, there is an inherent tension in language teaching between conformity and creativity. My initial training erred on the side of the former, where language learning was all about conforming to existing patterns and models and where creativity, if it was encouraged at all, seemed seriously constrained. In the PPP model, so-called "free production" tended to consist of tasks whose hidden agenda was "you can say what you want but you have to use the third conditional".

In that sense, I was trained to believe that what mattered most was the accurate reproduction of forms, along with the absolute avoidance of error. This belief has, of course, a long tradition. Kelly (1969), in his history of language teaching, quotes a certain G. Varenne, writing in 1905 on the subject of teaching written composition:

> To prevent [the pupils] from going outside their proper role, such exercises will have to be merely imitation or re-translation. They must not force the pupil to create new expressions – which will certainly be dangerous, but must force him to use expressions which are already familiar to him. (p. 159)

Compare this with the teacher's notes of the first course book I ever used, Louis Alexander's (1967) aptly titled *First Things First*:

> The student should be trained to learn by making as few mistakes as possible. He should never be required to do anything which is beyond his capacity... If the student is to make the most of his abilities he must be trained to adopt correct learning habits right from the start. (p. xii)

Not a lot had changed since Varenne's time.

Of course, a great deal of language use is *not* creative – in the sense of being original or innovative. Conformity is the norm. As Bakhtin (1986) observed some time back, far from being novel, most language use is second-hand:

> Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness"... These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (p. 89)

This is a view that linguists who subscribe to a usage-based model of learning also espouse: "We say things that have been said before. Our speech is a vast collection of hand-me-downs that reaches back in time to the beginnings of language" (Hopper, 1998, p. 159). And it is a finding confirmed by corpus linguistics, which suggests that a good deal of what we say and write accords with Sinclair's (1991) "idiom principle", that is the principle that "a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments" (p. 110). This contrasts with the "open choice principle", whereby "words are treated as independent items of meaning. Each of them represents a separate choice" (Sinclair, 1991, p. 175).

For Bakhtin (1986), the tension between conformity (or the idiom principle) and creativity (or the open choice principle) was construed as a tug-of-war between centripetal and centrifugal forces. As Braxley (2005) describes it:

> On the one hand, centripetal forces play a normative role, ensuring that speakers of the language will be able to understand one another. On the other hand, centrifugal forces keep the language alive and allow for the creation of new genres. (p. 15)

In fact, Bakhtin (1986) theorized that these opposing forces could be reconciled, and that conformity, far from being antithetical to creativity, might indeed be a precondition for it. As he put it, "The better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them... The more flexibly and precisely we reflect the unrepeatable situation of communication – in a word, the more perfectly we implement our free-speech plan" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 80).

"The unrepeatable situation of communication" reminds us that even imitation is a form of creativity, since a copy is never the same as the original. This is well exemplified by the hip-hop practice of *sampling*, i.e. the re-using of a segment of a recording in the creation of a new composition. Pennycook (2007), writing about "transcultural flows", quotes the musician DJ Spooky who describes sampling as "a new way of doing something that's been with us for a long time: creating with found objects" (p. 149). As he goes on to argue, "creativity rests in how you re-contextualise the previous expressions of others"; Pennycook (2007) comments that "this argument challenges notions of authorship, originality and creativity" (p. 149).

Indeed, "re-contextualising the previous expressions of others" might serve as a definition of language acquisition. As Eva Hoffman (1998) memorably put it in her memoir of learning English:

> Since I lack a voice of my own, the voices of others invade me as if I were a silent ventriloquist. They ricochet within me, carrying on conversations, lending me their modulations, intonations, rhythms. I do not yet possess them; they possess me... Eventually, the voices enter me; by assuming them, I gradually make them mine. I am being remade, fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt. (p. 220)

Sampling and patchwork: two images that neatly capture the intersection between conformity and creativity, and remind us that language learning is a process frequently involving – not just production – but RE-production. As Pennycook (2010) points out,

> language learning also profoundly involves mimicry, and once we are open to a view of mimicry as an act that changes the original, then the concern that language imitation is stultifying is no longer credible... Language repetitions, imitations and re-localisations as creative acts may be at least as significant for language learning as acts of creative construction or individual difference. (p. 139)

(Which makes me wonder if I had underestimated the creative potential of the tightly constrained methodology I was initially trained in.)

For Bakhtin (1986) the embodiment (literally) of creative mimicry was the notion of "carnival" – what Holquist (1990) glosses as "*a means for displaying otherness*: carnival makes familial relations strange" (p. 89). As an example of how this might apply to our own field, Lin and Luk (2005) describe how a class of teenagers in Hong Kong, "drawing on multiple social languages available to them in English and Cantonese", subvert language practice activities by engaging in a kind of "carnival creativity":

> These students manage to have a carnival type of laughter through creating "indecent" English dialogues within the school walls... Through populating the English language with their own local social languages and voices, they have appropriated English for their own purposes. (p. 89)

This suggests perhaps, that the tension between creativity and conformity is illusory, and that creativity is at its most carnival-esque when it is working within the tight constraints of existing forms and norms. No better example of this that I know of are the creative riffs that James Joyce (as cited in Ellmann, 1982) indulged in as a teacher of English in Trieste, based on the tightly scripted Berlitz textbooks he had to use – transcribed here from memory by one of his students:

> Berlitz, Berlitz, what I done to deserve this from you?
> Signor Berlitz and Signor Joyce, fool and beggar.
> A husband is usually an ox with horns. His wife is brainless. Together they make a four-legged animal.
> What is a pachyderm? See that man there with the trumpet for a nose and a sizeable belly – there's a pachyderm... etc., etc. (p. 216)

As the papers in this book affirm, creativity often flourishes where it seems most constrained, and in classrooms not the least.

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Creativity in ELT:
an introduction

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Creativity is one of the most exciting concepts that currently inform ELT. The attainment of creativity in the classroom is most probably dependent on teachers' own creative practices. However, these practices need not always be thought of as generating novelty out of nothing. This book consists of a selection of papers based on talks and workshops delivered at the 4th ELT Malta Conference. The book's title is derived from the theme of the conference and it brings together the perspectives of a group of international and Maltese experts in ELT, all of whom address the idea that creativity is a vital aspect of language learning and teaching.

PREAMBLE

It seems symptomatic of the social media era that most people's diet of inspirational quotes is nowadays supplied by social networking sites, awash as they are with the pithy quips and maxims of a host of enlightened writers, artists and celebrities. What was once the job of *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* is now being done by Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest among others. The original source of these quotes is rarely cited and their context and what provoked them is never given any importance. It seems as if we have all read Albert Einstein, William Shakespeare and Mahatma Gandhi, we have all listened to Steve Jobs's (2005) Stanford University commencement speech, and we have all watched *Dead Poets Society, Forrest Gump, Rocky Balboa* and *The Pursuit of Happyness*. In the process of ultra skimming through countless posts and tweets, with some luck such inspirational quotes are read and shared. However, if they are not properly digested the words would not be worthy of being termed 'inspirational'.

Recently, a school in Nicaragua used Instagram to post the following quote by the American author Joseph Chilton Pearce: "To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong." This quote was meant to encourage its students not to be afraid of making mistakes in their struggle to master the English language. Pearce wrote a number of books about child development and this particular quote is perhaps one of the most famous pronouncements on creativity. Beyond the school's use of the quote as a means of goading students to experiment with the target language, this sentence should also resonate with teachers in their endeavour to be creative practitioners. However, before discussing what this entails, it is perhaps better to start by attempting to define creativity.

A DEFINITION

Despite the burgeoning popularity of the term 'creativity' in ELT and education more broadly, it is most probable that conceptions of creativity are highly varied and at times conflicting. Hence, for our purposes, it is vital to establish a definition of creativity that makes sense within the context of ELT, one which derives from two converging definitions. In *The Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler (1964) maintains that rather than seeing creativity as the creation of something out of nothing it is more appropriate to conceive of it as the act of rearranging or regrouping already existing elements. He claims that creativity "uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills. The more familiar the parts, the more striking the new whole" (Koestler, 1964, p. 120). Hence, creative people are capable of "combining previously unrelated domains of knowledge in such a way that you get more out of the emergent whole than you put in" (Koestler, 1980, p. 344). In an attempt to challenge existing myths and draw on more realistic notions of creativity, Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) propose their own definition: "Creativity is the interaction among *aptitude, process, and environment* by which an individual or group produces a *perceptible product*

that is both *novel and useful* as defined within a *social context*" (p. 90). By fusing Koestler's (1964, 1980) and Plucker et al.'s (2004) definitions and applying them to ELT, it may be argued that creativity is a democratic phenomenon that all teachers and learners may embrace both as individuals and collaboratively because its strength lies in the interaction of the qualities these possess. However, fostering learners' creativity in the classroom is well-nigh impossible if one does not identify oneself as a creative practitioner.

CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS

Some teachers' misconceptions about what constitutes creativity impede them from positioning themselves as creative practitioners (Xerri, 2013). The myth that creativity is only about creating works of art or enabling learners to be artistic is detrimental to teachers' efforts to be creative. As language speakers we are all creative individuals. It takes a lot of creativity for a child to acquire a language and for a learner to use the language they are taught. However, as language teachers we can be even more creative when we think of new possibilities for language teaching and learning. Being creative is not exclusive to using arts and crafts, poetry or film in language lessons. While lessons incorporating activities based on those media and genres have the potential to act as creative impulses for learners when the latter demonstrate an "ability to read with imagination, make connections", create "metaphors and similes by way of explaining and interpreting" such texts (Vassallo, 2016, p. 95), the essence of creativity for teachers goes beyond classroom activities.

Being creative means daring to do things differently, thus expanding the boundaries of what we know about teaching and learning in order to discover new worlds within the confines of our classrooms. In fact, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) defines the creative individual as "someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain" (p. 28). Being creative means not just doing what trainers and other experts tell us we should be doing, but rather trusting our intuitions as educators to break new ground, research our practices, experiment with new pedagogies, and try out new activities or spin-offs of things we are used to doing. Being creative means we are not just followers but leaders, not just consumers but creators, not just an audience but sharers. Being creative means we do not hermetically seal our knowledge and experience inside our heads, but rather expressing the willingness to share with others. A community of creative educators is made up of professionals who are constantly learning from each other.

Some teachers are all too willing to sit back and learn from others, fearing that they cannot teach anything to their peers or to themselves, fearing that they have nothing new to say, that they are incapable of being creative. They do what they are instructed to do on a teacher training course, at a conference, or in a methodology book. However, possessing all that knowledge should not hinder

teachers from doing things differently, finding out for themselves what works and what is unlikely to be effective. There is no recipe for the perfect lesson; there is no manual that will ensure success in every single activity with every single student. Being creative means having faith in our expertise as teachers, who are knowledgeable about the learning context, the learners, the language, and the repertoire of methods and approaches at our disposal. Being creative means we do not let the dictums of others straightjacket us, but rather demonstrating the willingness to question everything and to apply multiple perspectives to every issue and problem we encounter.

Creative teachers are not just born creative. Creativity is a state of mind. It is a boundary that we need to cross in order to discover our potential to do things differently and be an inspiration for others. According to Alda (2007), we need to

> Have the nerve to go into unexplored territory. Be brave enough to live creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. It is not the previously known. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can't go there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you're doing, but what you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover will be yourself. (pp. 21-22)

Some teachers are uncreative because they allow fear to dominate them. They prefer living in the comfort zone rather than exploring the unknown. Whilst there are practically no more places on Earth for anyone to discover for the first time ever, there is a lot that can still be discovered about language learning and teaching. However, the number of teachers willing to act as explorers is perhaps insufficient. ELT requires as many teachers as possible determined to explore new frontiers.

Being creative means being unafraid to fail, especially since failure is a fundamental part of the teaching and learning experience. Which teacher has not tasted the bitterness of failure at least once over the course of their career? The most brilliant educators are the ones who have failed many times in their quest to achieve success, whether this be an amazing lesson, wonderful feedback, or a learner's attainment of seemingly impossible aims. Being creative means being willing to transcend our fears in order to discover that we can be right sometimes besides being wrong at other times. As de Bono (1990) points out,

> The need to be right all the time is the biggest bar to new ideas. It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong than to be always right by having no ideas at all. (p. 108)

The need to be right all the time is the essence of vertical thinking, which is a problem solving and decision-making approach that entails being selective, analytical and sequential as a means of avoiding failure. According to de Bono

(1990), an "Exclusive emphasis on the need to be right all the time completely shuts out creativity and progress" (p. 108). This is why it is important to use lateral thinking, which consists of both the willingness to perceive things in divergent ways and a series of thinking methods that can be learnt (de Bono, 1982).

LEARNING CREATIVITY

Teacher training programmes at pre- and in-service levels in ELT can play a pivotal role in enabling teachers to learn how to be creative. Such programmes have the potential to develop the knowledge, skills and beliefs that teachers require in order for them to position themselves as creative practitioners. For example, teacher training can provide teachers with the ability to engage in what Koestler (1964) calls bisociative thinking, which is the formation of a new matrix of meaning through the act of combining elements from previously unconnected matrices of thought. Enabling teachers to position themselves as creative practitioners in the classroom should become part of the remit of contemporary teacher training programmes.

In order for teachers to become creative practitioners, teacher training needs to transcend the idea that practitioners should only be provided with practical ideas for the classroom. Pedagogical understanding and subject knowledge have to be complemented by the cultivation of the belief in the potential of creative teaching to engage language learners. To facilitate this, teachers should operate in an environment that possesses optimal conditions crucial to creativity. Generally, this involves a number of influential factors, such as intra- and inter-group interactions, leadership, organisational structure, competition and cohesion.

Teacher training has the potential to foster true creativity in the learning environment by equipping teachers with the means to empower learners to think for themselves and generate their own innovations. Encouraging teachers to engage in creative activities as part of their training might help them to discover their own latent creativity and thus assume the stance of teachers who are willing to teach language in a creative fashion.

The act of enabling teachers to become creative practitioners involves re-evaluating the outcomes and objectives of current training programmes. Teacher training has a major role to play in engendering creativity in the classroom so it is necessary to examine the extent to which trainees are offered opportunities to participate in creative approaches when developing their pedagogical knowledge, skills and beliefs. Just expecting teachers to teach English creatively is not sufficient unless training programmes are themselves an embodiment of creative teaching methods.

CONCLUSION

The 4th ELT Malta conference spanned over four days, the first of which consisted of a whole-day workshop on creativity and digital literacies in ELT. The conference was composed of six plenaries and 30 workshops. This book brings together a selection of papers based on these sessions. The first group of papers by Alan Maley, Chaz Pugliese, Michela Formosa, Sarah Zammit and JJ Wilson underscore the vital importance of creativity's place in the classroom, especially since it is an intrinsic component of a broad range of human activities, foremost amongst which is language use. The papers by Antonia Clare, Maria Cutajar, Sarah Cutajar and Stephanie Xerri Agius discuss how a culture of creativity can be cultivated in the classroom through the amalgamation of creative and critical thinking, and the mind shift experienced by teachers when they position themselves as creative practitioners. Rebekka Mamo, Alan Marsh, Jean Sciberras, Candy Fresacher and Nicky Hockly illustrate how the use of literature, poetry, art, advertising and mobile devices respectively can act as a means of spurring learners' creativity. The next group of papers by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, Kevin Spiteri, William B. Laidlaw, Justyna Rogers and Patricia Vella Briffa explore different language systems and skills, reminding us that language use is perhaps one of the most common creative feats that learners engage in. The final set of papers by Jean Theuma, Larissa Attard and Steve Flinders examine two different language learning contexts, both of which require a high level of communicative ability on the part of learners. The value of creative practices in language learning and teaching is applicable to such contexts and many others.

The papers in this book encourage teachers to lead a creative life rather than limit themselves to creative moments interspersed among non-creative lesson activities. Being creative is not something we do temporarily. It should be a permanent fixture of our professional life. We do not stop being teachers when the lesson ends. Teaching is an intrinsic part of our identity. Similarly, creativity should be a constant feature of our teaching and our professional inquiry as educators within and outside the classroom. However, for that to happen we need to overcome our fear of being wrong. As Robinson (2006) maintains, "if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original". The authors of the papers collected in this book dare us to lose our fear of being wrong. They dare us to be wrong sometimes. That is how we can be right at other times. That is how we can be creative.

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Creativity: the what, the why and the how

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In this paper, I shall discuss the nature of creativity, argue that it is of prime importance to us both as teachers and as individuals and offer some practical suggestions for introducing more creative ideas in our teaching.

THE WHAT

Creativity is a multi-facetted quality, which may be why it has proved so difficult to define. As Amabile (1996) points out, "a clear and sufficiently detailed articulation of the creative process is not yet possible". Yet we readily recognise creativity when we meet it, even if we cannot define it precisely. For all practical purposes this is enough. There are of course, some features that are almost always present in a creative act.

Newness/originality

The core idea of "making something new" is at the heart of creativity. But novelty is not alone sufficient for something to be recognised as creative. It is also necessary for creative acts to be recognised and accepted within the domain in which they occur. They need to be relevant and practicable – not just novel.

Immediacy

This is sometimes described as the 'Eureka' moment. Many creative geniuses report that their insights came to them in a flash of sudden clarity. However, it is rare that an idea comes fully worked out. The initial flash of insight usually needs to be worked on and elaborated before it is fully realized.

Wonder

The truly creative act usually evokes feelings of pleasurable recognition on the part of others. A typical reaction would be, "Why didn't I think of that?"

Curiosity/play

Creativity usually seems to involve some kind of 'playing around' with things, with asking the question "What if . . .?", and the ability to think outside the box. This playful attitude seems to be one of the essential characteristics of creativity, and is especially important when applying creativity to teaching and learning (Carter, 2004; Cook, 2000).

Inspiration

The belief that creativity is a mysterious, unknowable gift from God is widespread and ancient. Very few contemporary writers on creativity would subscribe to this idea; however, there is broad agreement that much creative activity is largely unconscious.

The belief that creativity is a God-given quality encourages the unhelpful idea that only a few, chosen, people are endowed with this gift. It is true that H(istorical)-creativity, which involves producing something no one in history has ever created before, is the stuff of genius. But P(ersonal)-creativity is available to everyone; it involves individuals making creative discoveries which are new to them, if not to history. Carter (2004) rightly claims that "linguistic creativity is not

simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional quality of all people" (p. 13).

Finding/making connections

An important component of creativity is the ability to make new connections, often between apparently unrelated data. Koestler (1964) called this bisociation. In order to see new relationships, however, it may be necessary to suspend conscious attention, so that material that is on the periphery of our attention may gain access to the unconscious layers of mind. The idea that these ideas are stimulated by a period of incubation, while the conscious mind occupies itself with other things, is a constant theme of writers on creativity (Wallas, 1926).

Unpredictability

It is a paradox of creativity that it cannot be predicted, nor consciously invoked. It apparently comes about partly through chance happenings. Fleming's discovery of penicillin is a good example. Yet chance discoveries are usually only made by those able to recognize what chance has put in their way. There is a sense too in which we can only discover or create something when the time is ripe for it. With respect to language, the unpredictable nature of the teaching event and the need to find a creative, spontaneous response to it (Underhill, 2014; Underhill & Maley, 2012) is particularly significant.

Relevance

However innovative a creation may be, it is unlikely to be taken up unless it is recognized as relevant to the field in which it occurs. It is not enough for an idea to be innovative or surprising. Going to class without any clothes on would certainly be strikingly innovative but it would probably not be considered creative in any but the most trivial sense. Creative ideas must therefore be historically apt and relevant, as well as merely novel: "Even P-creativity requires that systematic rule-breaking and rule-bending be done in domain-relevant ways" (Boden, 1990, p. 254).

Flow

It is claimed that creativity is facilitated by being in a particular mental state, which has been called 'Flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1990). Flow states are characterised by an effortless, total absorption in the task in hand. When we lose ourselves in a book, or in a piece of writing, or in playing or listening to music, or in playing a game, in painting or making a sculpture, or in a conversation, then we are in a state of flow. For as long as it lasts, we are unaware of anything except the intense engagement in a timeless present. People engaged in creative activities often exhibit this quality. And, if we can find ways of establishing flow states in our classrooms, creative outcomes are more likely to ensue.

Constraints

Creativity is not about 'anything goes' or 'letting it all hang out'. On the contrary, creativity loves constraints: "Those who think outside the box need a box to think outside of" (Houstman, 2014). It seems that when we are forced to work with limited resources, or within a rigid set of rules, we are stimulated to find creative solutions. This is nowhere more true than in language. We need only think of poetry, where some of the greatest works are those with the greatest formal constraints, such as sonnets. Without the net, there is no game of tennis. One reason that constraints help creativity is perhaps that they provide a framework, which also acts as a support. And this is particularly true in language learning.

Teaching

One issue frequently raised is whether creativity can be taught? There are many, such as de Bono (1969) and Seelig (2012) who believe that it can. And there are shelves full of self-help books claiming to teach us how to be creative in our lives and in our work. What is certain is that creativity can be tacitly learned even if it cannot be explicitly taught. But unless we as teachers demonstrate our own commitment to creativity, and unless we offer our students a richly varied diet of creative practices, they are unlikely to learn it.

THE WHY

We cannot avoid it. The human species seems to be hard-wired for creativity. Humans are innately curious about their environment, which they explore tirelessly. Put in a maze, we will find our way out, but unlike rats, we are also capable of conceptualising a maze, and of designing one.

Creativity is also necessary for survival. The history of our species can be mapped with reference to key creative breakthroughs: agriculture, the wheel, writing systems, printing – a cumulative and constantly proliferating series of discoveries and inventions. Without this creative capacity, we would still be living in caves. Creativity helps us to deal with change, and as the world changes ceaselessly, so will more creative solutions be needed.

Linguistic creativity in particular is so much part of learning and using a language that we tend to take it for granted. Yet from the ability to formulate new utterances, to the way a child tells a story, to the skill of a stand-up comedian, to the genius of a Shakespeare, linguistic creativity is at work.

In the learning context, creativity also seems to stimulate, to engage, to motivate and to satisfy in a deep sense. This motivational power can be released when we allow students to express themselves creatively.

Likewise, creativity tends to improve student self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness. This enhanced sense of self-worth also feeds into more committed and more effective learning. When we are exercising our creative capacities we tend to feel more ourselves, and more alive.

THE HOW

First, I will suggest some ways we can lay the foundations for a more creative climate. For creativity to happen, we need to create favourable conditions for it. I will then suggest some generic ways in which we can develop creative activities – for students, for teachers, for the classroom and for materials.

General factors

- Establish a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere, where students feel confident enough to let go and not to worry about being criticised for errors. This means attending to what they are trying to express rather than concentrating on the imperfect way they express it.
- Frame activities by creating constraints. Paradoxically, the constraints also act as supportive scaffolding for students.
- Ensure that the students' work is 'published' in some way. This could be by simply keeping a large notice-board for displaying students' work, giving students a project for publishing work in a simple ring binder, or as part of a class magazine, setting up a class website where work can be published, and public performances. The effects on students' confidence of making public what they have created is of inestimable value.
- Encourage students to discuss their work together in a frank but friendly manner. We get good ideas by bouncing them off other people (Johnson, 2010). Help them establish an atmosphere where criticism is possible without causing offence. This implies creating a "storied class" (Wajnryb, 2003) – a co-operative learning community.
- Regularly encourage 'noticing' things and accurate observation. Encourage them to collect data that may be used later: pictures, games, DVDs, videos, websites, books and magazines. Students also need to be encouraged to follow up with 'research' – looking for more information, whether in books, on the Internet or by asking other people.
- Do not try to do too much. Take it easy. And be kind to yourself (Casenave & Sosa, 2007). Try introducing small changes over a period of time. And allow time for activities and for talking about them. Johnson (2010) among many others talks about the need for the slow burn of hunches and ideas.
- Do the activities regularly in order to get the best effects. Maybe once a week is a sensible frequency.
- Be a role model. This means working with the students, not simply telling them to do things. This is especially true for reading and writing activities. If you don't do it, why should they?
- Never underestimate your students. Their capacity for creativity will astound you, if you can help them unlock it.
- Make sure you offer a varied diet – of inputs, of processes and of

products (Maley, 1999). This diversity helps to promote an atmosphere of 'expectancy' ("I wonder what will happen today?"), rather than the feeling of 'expectation' ("Here we go again. Unit 4...").

- Apply the four golden principles: Acknowledge, Listen, Challenge, Support. Acknowledge the individuality of students who make up the class group by showing that you value their contributions. Learn to listen carefully and without pre-judging what they try to say. Make sure that you provide the right level of challenge in what you ask of them. And offer support to them while they struggle to meet that challenge. It sounds easy but of course, it is not.

Some generic principles for developing more creativity

My intention here is not to provide a set of oven-ready activities but rather to suggest some principles which can be used to develop various forms of creativity.

Use heuristics at all levels – By 'all levels' I mean that many of these heuristics (and others not mentioned here for reasons of space) can be used for teacher decisions, for developing materials, for varying classroom routines, and for devising student activities. It will be for the teacher to decide exactly how a given heuristic is applied.

A heuristic is a kind of 'rule of thumb'. Rather than applying a formula with a pre-determined outcome (an algorithm), heuristics work by trying things to see how they work out. The 'suck it and see' principle. Here are some examples of heuristics to try:

- **Do the opposite** (Fanselow, 1974, 2010). Essentially, it involves observing the routines and activities we consciously or unconsciously follow, doing the opposite and then observing what happens. Examples would be: if you always stand up to teach, sit down; if you teach from the front of the class, teach from the back; and so on.
- **Reverse the order**. Here you would do things backwards. For example, in dictation, instead of giving out the text at the end, you would give it out at the beginning, allow students to read it then take it away, then give the dictation; if you normally read texts from beginning to end, try reading them starting at the end; etc.
- **Expand (or reduce) something**. For example, increase (or decrease) the length of a text in various ways; increase (or decrease) the time allotted to a task; increase the number of questions on a text; increase (or decrease) the number of times you do a particular activity. Maley (1994, 1996) suggests 12 different generic procedures, including this one, to develop more interesting activities/materials.

Use the constraints principle – The idea here is to impose tight constraints on whatever activity is involved. For example:

- Limit the number of words students have to write – as in mini-sagas, where a story has to be told in just 50 words.
- Limit the amount of time allowed to complete a task – as when students are given exactly 1 minute to give instructions.
- Limit the amount of materials – as in a construction task where each group is given just 4 file cards, 10 paper clips and two elastic bands with which to build a structure and write instructions on how to construct it, etc.

Use the random principle – This is essentially using bisociation: putting two or more things together that do not belong together and finding connections. For example:

- In pairs – all the A's write 10 adjectives each on slips of paper, all the B's write 10 nouns. The slips are put in two boxes. Students take turns to draw a slip from each box, making an unusual combination, e.g. a broken birthday. When they have 10 new phrases they combine them into a text;
- Students are given pictures of 5 people taken at random from magazines. They then have to write a story involving all 5 characters.

Use the association principle – This involves using evocative stimuli for students to react to. For example:

- Students listen to a sequence of sounds, then describe their feelings or tell a story suggested by the sounds.
- Students are given a set of character descriptions and a set of fragments of dialogue – they   match the characters with what they might have said.
- Students are all given a natural object (e.g. a stone, a leaf etc.). They then write a text as if they were their object.

Use the withholding-information principle – This involves only offering part of the information needed to complete a task. Jigsaw listening/reading are examples of this. Other examples would be:

- A text is cut up into short fragments. Each student has one fragment. They have to reconstitute the text without showing their fragments to others. (The same can be done with a picture).
- A picture is flashed on the screen for just a second. Students must try to recall it.

Use the divergent thinking principle – The core idea here is to find as many different uses for a particular thing or ways of carrying out a task. For example:

- Teachers find alternative ways to do some of their routine tasks, i.e. set homework (Painter, 2003), take the register, give instructions, arrange the seating, do dictations (Davis & Rinvolucri, 1988), do drills, etc.
- Students find as many uses for a common object (e.g. a comb) as possible.
- Students find as many different ways of spending a given sum of money as possible.

Use feeder fields – Feeder fields are domains outside the limited field of ELT but which may offer insights of use in ELT (Maley, 2006). Examples would be:

- Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) (Baker & Rinvolucri, 2005);
- Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1985; Puchta & Rinvolucri, 2005);
- Literature (Duff & Maley, 2007);
- The Arts (Goldberg, 2006; Maley, 2009, 2010): Music (Graham, 2006; Paterson & Willis, 2008), Art (Grundy, Bociek, & Parker, 2011; Keddie, 2009), Drama (Maley, 2006; Maley & Duff, 2005; Wilson, 2008), Clowning (Lutzker, 2007), Story-telling (Heathfield, 2014; Wright, 2008), Creative Writing (Spiro, 2004, 2006), Improvisation (Nachmanovitch, 1990);
- Psychology and memory studies (Bilbrough, 2011; Helgesen, n.d.);
- Technology (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Stannard, 2016);
- Collections of creative ideas (Clandfield & Meddings, 2015; Pugliese, 2010).

CONCLUSION

If we believe that teaching is more than simply transferring knowledge from a teacher to learners and if we believe that the personal nature of learning is activated by fresh activities and inputs which engage the whole person at a deep level, then the ideas presented above may offer some lines of inquiry worth pursuing. I am not suggesting that swimming against the current tide in education is an easy task but "If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat" (Ortberg, 2001).

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Creativity in the classroom: from a pedagogy of certainties to a pedagogy of possibilities

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In this paper I would like to argue that creativity, far from being a trivial add-on, should be considered an absolute must in education. I will be referring here to the teacher's creativity, rather than the learner's, even though there might be a correlation between these two. creativity, as it's been defined by Sternberg and Lubart (1995), *is a cluster of skills that we use to fashion ideas or manufacture products that are both novel and valuable*. Thus, an idea, in our field, an exercise, or a task, an activity, must be new and useful, in order to be called "creative". This paper will briefly outline why creativity is needed in the teaching profession. It will then focus on the numerous barriers that hinder creativity. It will finally conclude with a few suggestions how to further the creativity agenda.

WHY CREATIVITY?

There are several reasons why creativity is a *conditio sine qua non* in education. Elsewhere (Pugliese, 2010), I have talked about the link between creative teaching and motivation, the students' as well as the teacher's. Here, I will try to highlight a few other reasons, but first, I would like to share some considerations about the nature of teaching. My belief is that teaching is not just a matter of routine application of techniques in a well-defined and well-controlled context. Every group is different because of its different history and the complexity of its interpersonal dynamics. A classroom is a microcosm governed by diversity: different social and psychological characteristics, different cognitive strengths and weaknesses, etc. As a result, our pedagogical offers should be as varied as possible: if they aren't, we would run the risk of excluding many of our students.

Teaching is also a problem-solving activity, just like music was a problem-solving endeavor to J. S. Bach, John Coltrane, or John Cage. One of the "problems" the teacher inevitably faces is how to make the interaction smooth, and how to maximize opportunities for the students to interact. Professor Steve Walsh (as cited in Fernández del Viso Román, 2012) has talked of the interaction in a lesson in terms of *planfulness* and *spontaneity*. Both are necessary, in his view: the former because the teacher (as well as the students) need to have a sense of where the lesson is going, what's coming next, etc. The latter, which refers to what he calls "*on-line decision-making*", is equally important because it can promote or hinder opportunities. This process is akin to improvisation, a pillar of jazz music. It's easy to see why creativity would be necessary if one adopts such a view of teaching.

One other argument for creativity is that students need to be surprised if they are to pay attention to what is going on in the lesson. Jerome Bruner (1979) has famously said one of the teacher's roles is to provide their students with *pedagogically effective surprises*.

Furthermore, students need to be primed for learning, that is, they need to enter a state of *readiness* or they will never be able to fully tune into the lesson. Finally, students must be stimulated with activities that transcend the language point they focus on. It is hard for me to think of ways to achieve all that without turning to creativity.

But when can a teaching idea (or exercise, task, activities) be called creative? I have come up with four key characteristics:

- **Unexpected**: the exercise has to generate some sort of surprise, so that the students will be hooked.
- **Simple**: by this I do not mean "dumbed down". Simplicity here refers to an exercise that uses what resources are available in the here-and-now. Leonardo da Vinci called simplicity "*the ultimate sophistication*".
- **Unconventional**: an exercise that breaks rules, that is, divergent.
- **Compact**: an exercise that is structured in many layers, lasagne-style, and that could be easily extended if need be.

OBSTACLES TO CREATIVITY IN ELT

For all its apparent benefits, it's largely undisputable that creativity is *cognitio non grata* in education. There are a number of factors that over the past few years have worked together to rob teachers of their passion for their profession. One such factor is the utilitarian, lock-step, overly-standardized view of education. Excessive testing becomes a barrier to creativity because teachers feel pressurized to believe preparing students for tests is their primary pedagogical goal. As a society we seem to have lost any sense of education as an opportunity to expand and develop minds. We want to prepare our students for work, when we should prepare them for life instead. Hence, teaching must be practical, it's often argued; the popularized notion being that teaching can either be practical or creative, but it can't be both. Which is, of course, a fallacy, since for an idea, or an approach, to be truly creative, it must be both original and valuable.

Another obstacle to creativity in education stems from teachers' over-reliance on methods and the view that a lesson can be looked at as a series of "*plannable*" mini-episodes. Teachers have always been fascinated by methods. The reason is simple: methods offer an illusion of certainties, but they're all illusions, false oases of sorts. This blind faith in methods, the concept that a lesson can be reduced to a series of mini-sections, has often been an obstacle to more experimentation, to more creative approaches to teaching. In reality, I believe that teaching is stochastic in nature, and as such, ruled by a series of events that cannot be predicted, or anticipated. There are no certainties, only possibilities, and failures can make useful starting points.

Yet one other factor has to do with the beliefs about creativity and the many myths that surround it. Let me mention just a few: the Big C-bias, that is to say people thinking they will never reach the heights of a da Vinci or a Newton. Luckily though, Big C-creativity (or genius type) is but one type of creativity. Other types have been identified in creativity research, namely:

- **Pro-C**: the creativity of someone who, without being an eminent creator, could make a living from playing jazz piano, for example.
- **Everyday-C**: this refers to a pianist who has passable skills, and possibly couldn't make a living out of his playing.

The point I'm trying to put forward here is that if teachers fail to recognize the importance of smaller levels of creativity, they might believe that creativity is an extremely rare trait to be found exclusively in a handful of eminent individuals.

Another deeply rooted view is that creativity is genetic (It isn't). Or that it cannot be taught or learned (It can). Or that creativity is such an elusive concept that no one has been able to define it. (Sternberg and Lubart's has been the working definition in the field since 1995).

Sometimes the sheer way teachers teach stands in the way of more imaginative approaches. In a recent study in general education, for example, Oakes and Lipton

(2007) found teachers out-talk their students by a ratio of 3:1. In contexts where this type of convergent teaching is predominant, it seems obvious that there is little room for creativity.

Finally, teachers who may be persuaded of the value of creativity in their practice refrain from using it because they work in environments that are unsupportive.

SUGGESTIONS

In this article I have first tried to explain why creativity, far from being a panacea, is a must in education. I have also highlighted some of the barriers to using more creative approaches to teaching.

By way of conclusion, I'd like to mention here a series of important steps that would put creativity in the limelight.

1. Creativity is unlikely to feature permanently on a teacher's agenda unless the idea of pedagogy of certainties is abandoned and replaced by a notion of teaching as possibilities.
2. If creative teaching is not valued in a particular context, we must create a sense of urgency.
3. It would help to connect creativity research and creativity training with teacher preparation courses. This would be key in addressing misconceptions about creativity and problematic practices teachers have inherited from their own prior schooling experiences.
4. More research is needed on the connection between creativity and learning. Unless educators, policymakers and the general public fail to see the links between creative practices and learning, barriers to creativity in the classroom will continue to exist.

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Colouring outside the lines

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We are often told to be more creative, but what is 'creativity'? How do we achieve it within the confines of a prescribed syllabus? Creativity in the classroom means we have to think outside the book, generate activities and materials that are unique to our class at the time, and never teaching the same unit twice. It also means avoiding the phrase "it always works well", and above all shocking our students out of their comfort zones, keeping them on their toes and more than anything not letting our lessons become routine. We should rethink the way we plan lessons and approach our students without losing sight of our aims and the intended learning outcomes for the students. In doing so, we hope that they perceive us as inspirational examples of creativity to adopt in their own learning and lives. In this paper, we will explore how to change monotonous lessons into engaging, dynamic and memorable ones, and how creativity benefits both our students and us teachers.

WHY BE CREATIVE?

As teachers we struggle with the notion of creativity. After all, we are very often given a syllabus of some kind to follow. Whether it is prescribed formally or agreed to with our students, it is there and as long as we deliver what is asked of us then we are fine.

The truth is there are many reasons to work from the prescribed text rather than re-work tried and tested published materials. It is easier: one can trust the author as an authority and follow their advice on how to deliver the unit. If students are given a course book they expect to use it; after all, they have paid for it. And so on and so forth; the list is endless. It is less time consuming: objectively, creativity takes a certain amount of time. There is the light bulb moment, the production of the material, and the plan.

However, creativity does not mean doing away with the course book; far from it. It does not mean that as teachers we do what we think is best; it does not mean that we have to re-invent the wheel every time; and it certainly does not mean we need special talents.

Being creative, on the other hand, means accounting for our students' preferences and learning styles. It means changing things round and switching them up to make them more interesting. It means opening the lessons up to other possibilities to broaden our students' horizons not only on content, themes and topics, but also for themselves. Using creativity in class just might inspire our students to be more creative in their lives.

The challenge we face is being creative within our context, within the confines that are set for us while respecting policies and procedures we must uphold.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines creativity as: "The use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work." This is fine, albeit somewhat limited to the world of art. This is how many view creativity, however, we fail to see that creativity is part and parcel of our daily life.

businessdictionary.com has a more fitting definition of creativity: "A mental characteristic that allows a person to think outside of the box, which results in innovative or different approaches." The reason this latter definition is more suitable is the fact that it talks about "thinking outside the box", in other words, looking at something in a different manner with fresh eyes. It mentions results; therefore it is concerned with a tangible outcome that can be measured in some way. Finally, "innovative or different approaches to a particular task" confirm the notion that tasks, no matter how mundane, can be given a new lease of life.

This is easily adopted in our profession; after all we are all about tasks. The learning by doing idea is one deeply ingrained in our approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, this leads us to the conclusion that creativity is not the privilege of the few artists among us, but is a feather in our caps that we should be taking full advantage of.

HOW IS CREATIVITY ADOPTED?

Creativity doesn't automatically happen. We all need to accept this. Like most things that are worth it, we need to work for creativity, we need to develop creative minds. Creativity, just like a child, must be nurtured. Creative minds must be immersed in a world that is interesting, exciting, dynamic and unexpected. We can't risk falling into routines as these are the deathbeds of creativity. So how do we dive into this world? The following are some ideas.

- **Find inspiration** – inspiration can be found everywhere. Inspiration for the creation of the workshop with the same title of this article came from a three-year-old girl who asked a seemingly innocent question. Inspiration is elusive if rather than tuning into the world around you you go about your days like a robot. A song, something someone says, something you read, a place and so on can all trigger off an idea which then grows. Awareness is key.
- **Carry a notebook** – you never know when inspiration is going to strike, so be prepared. Use whichever device you prefer to record your sparks of genius.
- **Follow your passion** – a hobby not only allows you to escape your everyday routine but it may open new possibilities, new sources of inspiration.
- **Listen** – everyone around you – family, friends, students, and colleagues – has something valuable to contribute. As Dr. Seuss (1954) put it in *Horton Hears a Who,* "after all a person's a person no matter how small".
- **Challenge the expected** – routines, patterns, systems are all valuable but become systematic and habitual very quickly which could lead to monotony and dullness. Challenge your students, colleagues and directors (why not) to rethink something they take as a given and give them the opportunity to question it. Reassure students that being inquisitive is a bonus in life. Innovation is often born out of questioning the ordinary to make it extraordinary.
- **Intuition** – intuition is very powerful when we allow it to emerge. Your experience often tells you when something will not work or produce the desired effect. Listen to your intuition and change or divert as necessary.
- **Personality** – be yourself and let your students see who you are. Teach in an honest manner and let your own self be one of the motivating factors to egg your students on.
- **Believe in yourself** – you are your worst enemy. Don't let doubts invade your mind. Trust that your intuitions and ideas are valid and can work.
- **Pick yourself up and dust yourself off** – mistakes must be taken as an opportunity to better yourself, they are not to be viewed as failure. Reflection is important to decide what went wrong and why. Every learning experience is an opportunity for growth.

LESSON PLANNING AND CREATIVITY

Part of the reason why we, the authors of this paper, chose to highlight creativity in lesson planning derived from feedback and reactions which we received after delivering the workshop with the same title at the 4th ELT Malta conference. The aim of the workshop was to highlight how we can jazz up a lesson from a course book, add a spark of creativity to tasks, while fulfilling aims at each stage.

To our surprise, during the workshop we realised that the importance of stages and stage aims was not apparent and as a consequence there was a struggle to recognise the aims proposed for each stage. It is therefore for this reason that the remainder of this paper will focus on ways to spice up tasks and achieve goals while keeping sour students engaged and motivated.

Can we plan for creativity?

Planning is a challenge. If we don't understand the purpose of stages and their aims then we are fighting a losing battle from the get go. Creative ideas cannot just be thrown into a lesson because they add a fun element. Creativity must have an aim within the lesson plan and to determine this we need to understand the stages of (and their purpose in) a lesson.

The first and foremost thing to keep in mind is that you are planning a lesson to deliver to a specific person or specific group of people. Therefore we must take our students into consideration first: their age, cultural and educational background, interests, preferences etc. Even if we know very little about them, not taking them into consideration is the first step down the wrong path. A path lined with "the same 10 lessons 'which always work'", "I know this book inside out", "I only teach B1 students" etc., these notions constitute everything that gives this profession a bad name. Hence, let's get our hands dirty and find out who our target audience is.

A well-done needs-analysis exercise will not only break the ice but also will easily solve the mystery about our students and address the aspects that influence effective learning discussed above. With the information gathered, we will be better able to create clear stages, define the stage aims and justify how to reach the final learning objectives.

What is the advantage of having well-defined stages and stage aims? Firstly, planning allows us to analyse the path we take our students down in the hope for them to achieve the pre-established outcomes. Understanding the purpose of every step of our lesson will help us get the students back on track should we go off at a tangent. Finally, understanding purpose can help us determine when to shake things up in order to engage, motivate and help our students achieve those outcomes. Marrying what they need to do with how they would best achieve will help us decide on the best approach to adopt.

Once we have defined the stages and stage aims, how do we determine whether our aims are valid? One of the most straightforward methods is using

the SMART model – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented and Timely. Specific – have the outcomes been defined? Measurable – has a task which encourages our students to use the target language been created? Achievable – is the task appropriate to their level and abilities? Results-oriented – does the task have a purpose? How do the students know when they have completed the task? Timely – has the right amount of time been allocated to the task? Is it challenging but achievable? If our aims follow the model then we should be on the right track.

Once all the above have been established, we can then move on to determining what we can effectively do to include creative elements and reap the benefits. The following are some things you can do.

- **Small changes matter** – start with small changes within your way of thinking, your approach and your certainties. Then transfer these tiny changes to the way you plan the stages of the lesson. These little sparks are vital to keep the fire going.
- **Make things lighter** – stage the small bits so that they are manageable for both you and your students. There will be less pressure on everyone which means everyone is comfortable to give their best.
- **Published vs. authentic material** – replace some of the published material with authentic resources. Authentic material is real, relevant and more up to date. It will surely engage your students more and help them see the relevance of what you are giving them.
- **Avoid repetition** – you may be teaching the same item but not to the same people. You must adapt and transform according to your students. Teach with passion rather than routine.
- **Release control** – involve your students in the decision-making process whenever possible. Let them take ownership of their language learning and talk to them to negotiate a way forward. This is another opportunity for you to learn something about your students.
- **Get your students moving** – eliminate the dangers of sameness by creating different layouts of seating that facilitate and encourage communication among students. If there is no space in you classroom, take them out to common areas, corridors, terraces etc.
- **Vanish** – is our presence always necessary? Can we move out of the limelight to allow our students to shine?
- **Make your students work then show their work off** – ask for the best out of your students, do not settle for anything less. Then display their work and be proud of it and let them be proud of it.
- **Observe** – observe your students and the way they learn and the tools they prefer. Then include elements of these in your lesson so you may account for all your students as individuals.
- **Learn** – how does learning take place? Be aware of how the brain works and what promotes learning.

What do we do to our students when we work only within the confines of a course book?

Asking students to work within the confines of a course book places them all in the same box in which they will not fit as they are all different. Try placing a square block through a circular hole. It is unfair to ask them to conform to something they don't own, something they haven't participated in creating. In doing so, we create dependent learners who only know how to work within a course book, who lack the ability to apply their newly found knowledge to new circumstances and the real world. As a result, low motivation levels ensue along with their frustration at only being able to be effective in a classroom, if at all.

If conforming is counterproductive it is also because it does not promote critical thinking, a process through which we observe, analyse, apply, evaluate, question, reflect, reason, communicate, etc. If we are too concerned with completing a unit rather than helping our students reach those outcomes, we are robbing them of the opportunity to grow all round. We see this only too often in systems that are intensely concerned with examinations and certification.

It is universally agreed that educators are inevitably role models, therefore as role models we have to promote creativity, thinking out of the box and using critical thinking skills. We owe it to our students to demonstrate how these are used in learning and how they can be applied to all other spheres of life.

Bringing down the confines

The following are some ways to ignite your course book.

- **Drama and mime** – although role-plays have been one of the long-time favourite activities in course books, we can hardly call them creative. Language is not only about the words we utter but the emotions, gestures and expressions that we use to convey meaning. Encourage students to creatively act out their dialogues by using exaggerated emotions and facial expressions. This will surely induce laughter, which in turn will make learning memorable.

  Grammar too can benefit from a little drama in class. Let's take tenses as an example. Make students write a sentence or two using whatever tense or aspect of tense they wish on strips of paper. Collect the strips in a bag or hat and ask for a volunteer to start off the activity by picking a strip of paper and miming the sentence written on it. The student who guesses the sentence and tense aspect is next to mime.

- **Do things upside down** – observe what your students expect and do the contrary! Do not follow exercises blindly as they are in your course book, both the order of activities and the tasks themselves. Re-write the instructions or simply ask the students to close their books as you will dictate the new instructions to them. Consider a reading comprehension

task – instead of making students answer comprehension questions after reading the text, get them to close their books and you dictate the answers to the questions in the book. Instruct students to create questions to the answer.

- **Give students importance** – tell students that they are going to be material writers. Divide the class into small groups. Select a reading or a listening text from the course book and present it to the class. Have a short discussion about what type of tasks they normally do with a text from the course book such as true or false, multiple-choice, vocabulary exercises, and so on. Advise students that the different groups will create different tasks to make a whole lesson when put together. Obviously, when done, each group has to deliver their task to the other students – just as you do while teaching!

- **Art attack** – drawings are amongst the most expressive media that we use to convey meaning. Even the worst drawing tells a story. This activity can be done by using both reading and listening texts. Ask students to read or listen to a text and draw their interpretation of what they 'see' while reading or listening. How do they interpret the authors' thoughts and meaning through their drawings? Encourage them to explain their drawing to the class as feedback.

- **Personalisation** – this is definitely that one activity which drives learning home. Encourage students to personalise language as much as they can. If they're bored of being asked the same question over and over again – "What about in your country?" – make students dig deeper and deeper into the roots of their cultures, tales of their nations, and in the corners of their kitchens; encourage them to tell their story. Everyone has a story. One example of a task that gets students sharing their knowledge and ideas is to delete parts of a text and ask the students to replace them with their own ideas, thus creating a modified text which is relevant to them. Show and Tell is another activity in which students bring something to class (such as a photo, picture or object) and talk about it for a set amount of time. Top 10 list tasks are an effective way of encouraging students to contribute something of their own. While collaborative learning is preferred, individual work time is still important and these activities lend themselves well to both. It is imperative that the students are made to feel relevant.

ROUNDING UP

To conclude, we will look back to the beginning of this paper and re-evaluate the struggle we face as teachers. We have determined what creativity is and is not, and how to foster it and introduce it in our lessons. It now seems less of a struggle.

We have dispelled the myth that creativity is for the few who are blessed with

artistry. By adopting small changes and tips to ignite our course book we too can master creativity effectively.

We all have a creative spark rooted in us somewhere. All we have to do is tap into it and tackle small bits at a time. After all Rome was not built in a day, so we cannot expect ourselves or our students to adapt to change at a fast pace or in huge chunks. Patience is a virtue; virtue is a grace. With hindsight we, the authors, have realised how all those tiny steps have made the difference in our teaching and our students' learning and motivation.

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Creativity and language

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This paper first looks at the types of creative language use found in everyday contexts and in more literary contexts. The former includes jokes, puns, slogans and other types of word manipulation, while the latter includes features such as stories, rhyme and rhythm. The paper then discusses whether this type of creativity should be explicitly incorporated into language classrooms, taking into account various factors such as the students' sensibilities, the purpose of the course, and the culture of the institution.

INTRODUCTION: BEANS, EXISTENTIAL GRAFFITI AND NAIPAUL'S COMMA

In 1967, advertising executive Maurice Drake needed a slogan. The food company Heinz had hired him to come up with a line to advertise baked beans, not the most obviously appealing product on the market, and Drake was struggling. With the deadline approaching, he went to a pub in Victoria, London, and ordered a beer and sandwiches. A few bites later, the Eureka! moment arrived. The slogan? "Beanz Meanz Heinz."

Beanz Meanz Heinz was used by the company for four decades. Copywriter Nick Asbury described it as "a piece of pure commercial poetry", and in 2012 it was named the top advertising slogan of all time by *Creative Review Magazine*. The unusual *nz* consonant cluster, the rhythmical bounce of a three-word, three-syllable slogan, and the fact that Heinz's rivals would never be able to imitate it, all made Beanz Meanz Heinz a masterpiece of creative language use.

Stroll down the streets of London, LA or New York and you will see linguistic creativity everywhere. You will pass stores with strikingly witty names: an opticians and glasses vendor called Spex Appeal; a medical supplier for senior citizens called Cane and Able; a furniture shop called So Far So Good; Chinese restaurants called Wok This Way and Peking Inn.

And then there are artistic names based on literary works and films: a restaurant called Pita Pan; a wine shop called Planet of the Grapes; a cocktail lounge named Tequila Mockingbird; a personal grooming and massage parlour called Facial Attraction; and a dog grooming service named Indiana Bones and the Temple of Groom.

Go down some of the darker alleys, walk the bridges and tunnels, and take a look at the graffiti. On an abandoned bed, someone has written "Nothing really mattress." Another graffiti artist wrote "I never finish anyth." Graffiti artists even talk to one another through their art: one message reads "Question everything", to which a second graffiti artist has responded "Why?"

In perhaps the only known of example of a Nobel Prize winning writer contributing to graffiti, the Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul, on reading the racist message "Keep Britain White" scrawled on his front door, simply added a comma: "Keep Britain, White."

Creative language use is all around us. If we open our eyes and ears, we see and hear it just about everywhere: in children's jokes, on billboards, in everyday conversation, even on gravestones ("Here lies Emily White. She signaled left and then turned right."). Headline writers at newspapers come up with witty absurdities at regular intervals:

- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
- Iraqi Head Seeks Arms
- Lack of Brains Hinders Research

- Milk Drinkers are Turning to Powder
- Dam Nearly Finished but Much left to Do

In advertising, as the Beanz Meanz Heinz story illustrates, creative language use is vital. Ronald Carter (2004) begins his seminal book *Language and Creativity* with an anecdote about how, while sitting at an airport, he saw an ad for an airliner:

abcdefghijklmnop rstuvwxyz
No queue.

What is the purpose of such language use? Firstly, it catches our attention. It amuses and delights us. Secondly, it sometimes reminds us of the power of language, and its precariousness. Naipaul's comma changes everything**.**

ADVENTURES IN LINGUISTICS WONDERLAND

One feature of linguistic creativity is its playfulness, sometimes called *ludic* uses of language. This includes any form of word- or phrase-manipulation. A common example might be the use of puns, as in the film titles *Bee Movie*, *The Santa Clause*, *Maid in Manhattan*, *Knight and Day,* and *Shanghai Noon* (a pun on the title of an earlier movie, *High Noon*). For audiences, there is an immediate recognition that these titles involve plays on words.

Other titles contain language play that is only revealed once the audience has seen or read the work. Lynne Truss's book *Eats Shoots and Leaves* sounds as if it describes the life of a panda bear. On reading the book, which is a critique of bad writing, we realize that her title shows what happens when writers use punctuation incorrectly (a person eats, shoots, and leaves; a bear eats shoots and leaves).

Similarly, the title of the 2010 film *The King's Speech* appears to describe an oration given at a moment in time. But on watching the film, we realize "speech" also refers to the way the king speaks; he has a stutter, which is central to the plot. Another pun to add resonance to the title.

Besides word play, linguistic creativity also includes literary features: simile and metaphor, story, rhyme and rhythm. These can be illustrated easily if we take a look at the genre of children's fiction.

One of the oldest forms of children's fiction is the fairy tale, and one of the first things that strikes us about traditional fairy tales is that they often contain unusual names: Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin, Rapunzel. These alert the child reader/listener to the joys of language – its sounds, its musicality. They may also evoke far-off lands: Mowgli and Bagheera, Aladdin and Jafar.

Rhyme and rhythm also play a significant part in children's stories. These features are often used in incantations repeated throughout the tale. In 'Jack and The Beanstalk', the giant repeatedly says, "fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman". In 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves', the evil queen asks, "Mirror,

mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" The Gingerbread Man keeps taunting his pursuers with the couplet, "Run, run, run as fast as you can! You can't catch me – I'm the gingerbread man!" In every case, these lines serve as motifs. They bring us back to an essential feature of the story: the giant is a man-eating ogre; the queen is driven by vanity; the gingerbread man is an escape artist.

Another aspect of linguistic creativity found in children's stories is parallelism. Formulaic, grammatically identical sentences recur throughout the story but with one feature or word changed every time. Little Red Riding Hood says to her grandmother (the wolf in disguise), "What big ears you have! What big eyes you have! What big teeth you have!" In 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', the bears ask, "Who's been eating my porridge? Who's been sitting in my chair? Who's been sleeping in my bed?" These parallel sentences – variations on a theme – serve to bring the drama to a crescendo, each sentence building on the previous one. They also, incidentally, reflect the oral origins of fairy tales: formulae are easier to remember than distinct, unique sentences.

Other aspects of linguistic creativity found in children's stories are riddles and nonsense. Lewis Carroll's classic novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is so stuffed with illogic and bizarre flights of fancy that it has become the go-to source for quotations for all kinds of academic disciplines ranging from semiotics to theoretical physics. Carroll's poem 'Jabberwocky', from *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, begins:

'Twas Brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

The poem has been lauded and anthologized for 150 years despite its ambiguous meaning and despite it being full of *nonce* words (invented words such as "slithy" and "tove"). Ironically, bearing in mind the fact that the poem is supposed to be nonsense – in the story, it appears in a dream – a few of the nonce words in the poem, including "galumphing" and "chortle", have become accepted parts of the English lexicon.

All of these features, found in children's stories, can be considered creative uses of language. But is it necessary or even desirable to include such features in courses for language learners?

COLORLESS GREEN IDEAS: REASONS FOR INCORPORATING LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY

If you want to incorporate a poem or a piece of fiction into a language class, you are always taking a risk. Some students need English because they want to travel. Understanding an Emily Dickinson poem will not help them buy train tickets or

read menus in English. Other students need English for work purposes. How will grappling with a Shakespeare sonnet help them to draft an email to a colleague?

In a nutshell, the question is this: will the dividend be worth the investment of time? Is the risk worth the reward?

Perhaps the best reason for incorporating linguistic creativity in language courses is that it can make material more memorable for students. Rhyme has been used as a mnemonic for centuries. Storytelling is one of the most ancient arts known to Man, and for most of human history was the way in which knowledge was passed down to the next generation. To remember new language usually requires us to put it in a memorable context, and nothing is more memorable to students than when they apply personal creativity to make the language 'theirs'.

Support for this view comes in the form of Guy Cook's (2001) well-known article '"The Philosopher Pulled the Lower Jaw of the Hen": Ludicrous Invented Sentences in Language Teaching'. The article proposes that the ridiculous sentences found in some language learning materials have value. Among other arguments, Cook (2001) explains that such sentences can promote the noticing of new language, as well as serving as mnemonics. To give an example of the latter, Chomsky's (1957) famous nonsense sentence "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" has survived in linguistics texts for 60 years partly because the sentence itself is so striking and strangely poetic. As a demonstration of the difference between syntax and semantics, it is flawless. It is also possibly the closest thing to Surrealism in Linguistics.

While few of us make masterworks like those of Lewis Carroll or Noam Chomsky, when we speak or write we frequently create something new. People do not talk exclusively in pre-fabricated phrases and formulaic patterns. We use language to negotiate meaning, to describe our opinions, to react to novel situations and new phenomena, and as we do so we move beyond the things we have said and heard before. In other words, we become creative.

Much day-to-day language is transactional – it is used to pass messages from one person to another – but other language is used for its beauty or its capacity to engage the spirit as much as the intellect. This is the language of fiction or poetry or song. Literary uses of language transport us to imaginary worlds, evoke for us the mysteries of existence. This is another reason for incorporating creative language use in language courses: it can inspire some students.

While we have seen two good reasons for including linguistic creativity – inspiration and *aide memoire* – when deciding whether to include creative uses of language in a course, we need to examine other factors: the students, the teacher, the course, the institution and its goals, and the culture at large.

The students

One of the first factors to consider is the students' level. Beginners and Elementary students need survival English. Creative uses of the language will mean little to

them. They will not have the linguistic resources to understand word play in English, to appreciate a pun or a joke. As the students develop a broader vocabulary and gain more exposure through texts and recordings, they begin to grasp nuances of the language. They start to appreciate register – formal versus informal – and the relationship between the written and spoken word. Many have observed that you're really getting somewhere with a new language when you start to get the jokes. This process will probably begin as students approach an Intermediate level. By the time they reach Advanced, students should be alert to metaphors and puns, rhyme and riddle.

Another factor is the character and nature of the students. Do they read in their own languages? Are they themselves creators (songwriters, designers, artists, architects)? If they consider themselves creative, might they appreciate an insight into the work of other creators whose medium is English? Might they also be more inclined, through habit, to come up with their own creative ideas?

A third factor is language ego. What can we glean about our students' self-esteem and level of inhibition? Are they likely to be risk-takers or introverts? To what extent does it depend on age? Very Young Learners are commonly less inhibited when it comes to expressing themselves, but this changes as students reach puberty. As adults, students vary enormously in their willingness to tap into creativity. Some love reading poetry, acting out scenes, or devising dialogues in class; others see these activities as a waste of time.

The teacher

It is now fairly well-established that creative teachers tend to incorporate their hobbies and interests into their classroom practice. For example, tech-oriented teachers may set up classroom blogs and excel at organizing online projects. One 'foodie' teacher taught English through cooking. Another teacher who regularly listened to the radio arranged for his students to make a professionally produced radio programme that was broadcast to the local community. A teacher who moonlighted as an artist (actually it was the other way round) arranged visits to studios, interviews with painter friends, and gallery visits, all conducted in English for an arts-oriented language class.

The course

Let's say we are teaching Business English. The language is seen as a specific but limited tool, and the students will need to achieve specific but limited business tasks using this tool: making presentations, describing companies, explaining processes. In such a context, genres such as poetry will probably not feature. The students are unlikely to see the relevance. However, other elements of creative language use will be applicable. We have already mentioned creativity in advertising campaigns. There is also creativity involved in staples of Business English courses; negotiating, delivering presentations, and contributing ideas to meetings. While

these are seldom regarded as belonging to the domain of *artistic* creativity, they still require original and effective uses of language.

What about General English? Should the students be exposed to – and asked to come up with – linguistic creativity? A general argument goes like this: if we want to teach the full spectrum of language use, then creative genres such as poetry and plays, fiction and song should be featured.

Culture in the classroom and institution

Each classroom has its own culture, as does each institution. Some classrooms are almost silent places. The students and teacher have established working routines that involve little interaction, which is not to say that they lack creativity. Other classrooms are abuzz with energy. Every voice is heard and valued. And some classes are inclined towards 'making'. They are involved in creative projects, they use different media to interact with English, and maybe they prize self-expression above accuracy. The latter type of class might be the one in which students become designers, poets, and actors.

An institution's culture depends on a variety of things, particularly its leadership and its history. A school that basically operates as an exam factory is unlikely to value creativity. In contrast, a school that permits great autonomy for its teachers and students may well foster a creative mindset. The examples quoted above, in which teachers brought their hobbies into the classroom, very much depended on the institution allowing them to do this. What type of institution allows its teachers to take students beyond its four walls to an art gallery on the other side of the city? What kind of leader sanctions the use of the school kitchen so that students can bake cookies during class hours?

Culture in the society at large

As for the wider idea of culture, education in some societies is viewed as a top-down system in which the authority figure, the teacher, is expected to transmit knowledge to students in what is sometimes called a banking model of education (Freire, 1970). In this kind of context, there may be no space for student creativity or for examining creative language use.

In other societies, education is more closely tied to the idea of exploring human potential (Dewey, 1960; Hooks, 1994; Kozol, 1972). This goal necessitates an atmosphere of self-expression and permissiveness.

To illustrate the issue here, we can look more closely at a lesson mentioned earlier in this section. A teacher got his students to make a radio programme. Would this be possible in all cultures? Were the students warned about what they could and couldn't say? Was the programme live or recorded? Were the students censored? Did the programme's owners know what the students were going to talk about beforehand? How would the owners have reacted had those students chosen to criticize the host country? All of these questions relate to culture in

society and more specifically to freedom of expression.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the pervasiveness of linguistic creativity in society – its ubiquitous nature and its variety, and discussed reasons for including or not including it in language courses. We have also looked at a number of variables to be considered when we decide whether to include creative uses of language in our courses.

Overall, for the purposes of language awareness, I would recommend first incorporating noticing activities so that students are alerted to creative uses of language produced by others. At levels above Elementary, students can then be asked to produce texts with elements of creativity such as dialogues and simple, scaffolded poems, and to take part in extended speaking activities that demand spontaneous speech, such as negotiations and role plays.

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Creativity in ELT: ideas for developing creative thinking

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Creativity is often cited as one of the 21st century skills we need to be teaching our students. But why is creativity so important in language classrooms?   And what exactly do we mean by creative thinking skills? In this paper we will look at how we can nurture a culture of creativity in our classrooms and demonstrate practical ideas for exploiting images, and engaging the emotions and the senses to create short texts and poems. We will also explore the use of frameworks to encourage learners to become actively and creatively involved in the learning process.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

It's easy when we think of creativity to think about BIG-C creativity and creative geniuses like Picasso, Mozart or Einstein, people whose creative achievements have shaped the world we live in. It can be easy to forget that creativity also involves what we might call little-c creativity, the creativity involved in our everyday actions and the choices we make: the way we arrange flowers in a vase, elaborate on a favourite cooking recipe, find a solution to a difficult problem, or even just in the words we choose in order to express our ideas. Certainly, as teachers creativity is very much a part of how we choose to plan and prepare our lessons.

ARE YOU A CREATIVE TEACHER?

Let's briefly look at the idea of what 'being creative' means and how this relates to the language classroom. What does being creative mean to you as a teacher? Complete the following sentence with your own ideas: *Being creative means...*

I've asked this question to teachers around the world, and it seems that a lot of us share the same kinds of ideas. People talk about finding a fresh way of doing things, planning a new lesson from scratch, looking for interesting ways to engage learners, approaching things in an imaginative way. They also mention taking risks and experimenting with new ideas, bringing bits of yourself to the classroom, and having the freedom and the space to think. It seems that 'being creative' is an inherent part of what we think helps us to be good teachers.

Most teachers say that creativity is a hugely important part of their job, not just because it helps their students to learn, but also because it helps them to develop. Finding ways to be creative in their work helps them to develop as teachers, and as people. In Chaz Pugliese's (2010) book *Being Creative* he uses the following cycle, which I've adapted here to show how when a teacher is creative, they grow, they find ways to engage their students, so student motivation increases, which in turn feeds into increasing teacher motivation. And so we get this creative cycle of learning and development.

FIGURE 1: THE CREATIVITY CYCLE

TEACHER MOTIVATION → CREATIVITY → GROWTH → ENGAGEMENT → LEARNER MOTIVATION → TEACHER MOTIVATION
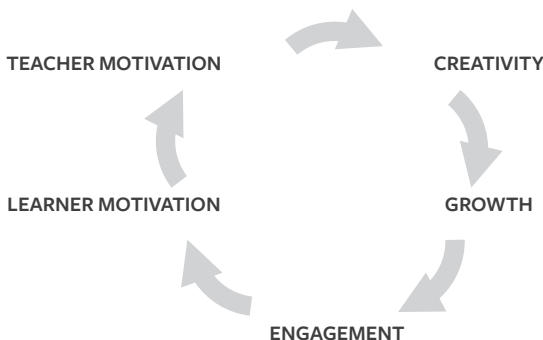
Adapted from *Being Creative* (2010)

CREATIVE VS. CRITICAL THINKING

What exactly do we mean by creative thinking skills? Well, let's test yours. Give yourself 30 seconds to complete the following task:

How many uses can you think of for the following cardboard tube? You could use it as a telescope, a flute, a tennis racquet...

FIGURE 2: CARDBOARD TUBE

How many ideas can you come up with? Four, five, six? If you got more than six, you're brilliant, potentially a creative genius.

What we find with a test like this, is that 'creative' people will come up with lots of ideas, and less creative people will start to struggle after a while. Unsurprisingly, children will have loads of ideas, and that's because they are more flexible in their thinking. However, as we grow older, we start to limit our number of choices. We start to use logic and self-edit our ideas saying things like, "Oh, that won't work." Or we worry that people will laugh and think that our ideas are stupid. In short, we become more rigid in our way of thinking.

We can think about creative thinking in terms of four factors:

1. **Fluency** – the ability to generate lots of ideas
2. **Flexibility** – the ability to shift perspective to have a variety of ideas
3. **Elaboration** – building on existing ideas, connecting and re-arranging them
4. **Originality** – the ability to come up with something completely new

(Alvino, 1990)

We can consider that there are really two kinds of thinking: creative thinking and critical thinking.

FIGURE 3: CREATIVE VS. CRITICAL THINKING
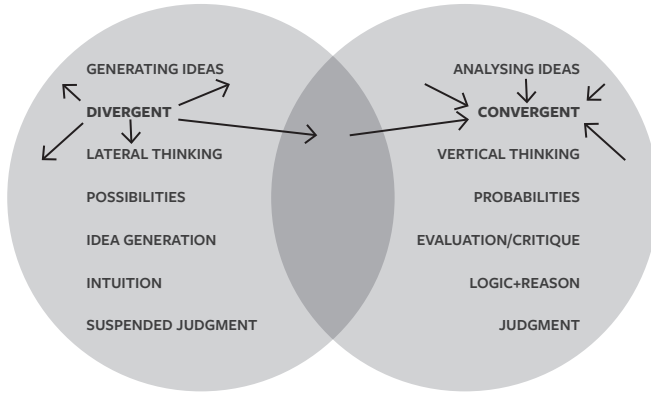
The diagram shows how creative thinking is a more divergent type of thinking, where spontaneously many creative ideas are generated and evaluated, multiple possible solutions are explored in a short amount of time, and unexpected connections are drawn.

Critical thinking involves more convergent thinking, the kind of thinking that focuses on coming up with the single, well-established answer to a problem (e.g. a multiple choice question).

In an activity like problem solving however, we can see that both kinds of thinking are important to us. First, we must analyse the problem; then we must generate possible solutions; next we must choose and implement the best solution; and finally, we must evaluate the effectiveness of the solution. As you can see, this process reveals an alternation between the two kinds of thinking, critical and creative. In practice, both kinds of thinking operate together much of the time and are not really independent of each other.

WHY IS ALL THIS IMPORTANT IN THE CLASSROOM? THE CREATIVITY CRISIS

This relates back to these kinds of tests we've just been looking at, tests designed to measure a child's creativity quotient (CQ). Like with intelligence (IQ) tests, which have been used since the beginning of the last century, we tend to find that with each generation of children scores increase. In fact, IQ scores go up by about 10% every generation. This is known as the Flynn Effect, and is thought to be due to the ever-increasing access to information and education. When psychologists looked into the development of CQ, they noticed the same thing. Results showed a steady increase. That was until 1990, when researchers in the US noticed that

CQ started to consistently decline. Today's children are on average notably less creative than children twenty years ago. And this is despite the huge emphasis on raising education standards.

The standardisation of education has led to people who are less creative than ever before. And yet we live in a very fast-changing world, where people need to be creative in order to adapt to what's happening. In the words of Ken Robinson (2011), "As the world spins faster and faster, organisations everywhere say they need people who can think creatively, communicate and work in teams: people who are flexible and quick to adapt. Too often they say they can't find them" (p. 2).

So, it's incredibly important that we bring creativity back into the classroom, that we allow teachers the time and the freedom to develop, and to focus on higher order thinking skills, such as creating and evaluating, rather than getting stuck with the lower order skills of just understanding and remembering. Figure 4 shows a thinking skills hierarchy based on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy.

FIGURE 4: THINKING SKILLS HIERARCHY

- CREATING
- EVALUATING
- ANALYZING
- APPLYING
- UNDERSTANDING
- REMEMBERING

We need to ensure that our education systems nurture skills like being open to new possibilities, taking risks, taking a new approach to things and thinking outside the box.

A FEW PRACTICAL IDEAS...

So, what can we do with our learners? Is it as easy as walking into our classrooms with a blank canvas and giving our learners free rein to do as they please? Give them a piece of paper and ask them to write a story?

Perhaps this would help to some degree. However, blank canvases and blank bits of paper are too scary for most people. It can be more productive to give people some lines to colour in, guidelines, and then allow them the freedom to colour outside the lines as well, if they want to.

It's interesting to note that creativity often thrives in restraint. Look at the example of the book *Gadsby* by Ernest Vincent Wright (1939). He set himself the

task of writing a 50,000-word novel, without using the letter 'e'. It's not a great story, but it's a fantastically creative feat, and a wonderful example of constrained writing.

1. Use a framework to trigger creative thinking

Six word story
It's said of Ernest Hemingway that "he worked hard to never say anything the same way that anyone else would say it", and he was very successful. Back in the 1920s he made a bet. He bet that he could write a complete story in just six words. He won the bet by taking out a napkin and writing on it the following words: *For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn.*

This story forms a good framework for a lesson. Students read about the story of Hemingway and then write their own stories. Here are a few stories written by teachers:

- Forgot mother's birthday. Delisted from inheritance. (Leah Montano)
- Went with the flow. Enjoying journey! (Carol Goodey)
- Got up late. Missed my opportunity. (Elisa Gomez)
- Learnt English. A whole world opened. (Liliana MacShane)
- Married a Greek. Ended in crisis. (Beata Ozieblowska)

Students can have lots of fun inventing their own stories. If you have a chance, take a look at this video of Six Word Stories, produced by a class of English learners at EOI Carabanchel, in Spain: https://goo.gl/Rd16lM

The framework here is very simple; it's just a word limit. Word limits are very useful. I often use them for creating stories as they help to make the task more manageable. Get your students to write 100-word stories or a 50-word summary of a video clip. Sometimes all you need is a starting point. Here's a great resource for you: http://writingexercises.co.uk The website offers writing prompts, a story generator, random first lines etc. Get your students to work in groups. Each group gets a different first line, e.g. *Everyone was asleep except...*

Groups then collaborate to write their stories. By giving learners a word limit, suddenly the task becomes achievable and there's an element of challenge. Learners have to work really hard on elements of syntax to decide which words are important, and which can be left out – so it's great from a linguistic point of view too.

My life in film
Here is an example of a spoken framework taken from *Speakout: Intermediate* (Clare & Wilson, 2011).

FIGURE 5: SPOKEN FRAMEWORK

If we look at the elements of creative thinking we discussed earlier, we can see how a task like this involves each of the four elements: fluency, because we ask learners to think of lots of different ideas; flexibility, because rather than just tell us a story from their past, we ask learners to think from a different perspective (your life as a film); elaboration because we ask learners to ask each other questions and add details; and finally, originality, because each learner will come up with a completely unique story. By asking learners to complete the filmstrip before they speak, we also give them thinking time. Allowing learners thinking time before they actually speak is crucial to helping them become more adventurous with their language.

2. Using emotions and the senses...

Writing an emotion poem

Let's look at how we could engage our learners' emotions in a lesson that gets them to write their own poems.

Did you know there are only six basic emotions and they can be universally recognised by our facial expressions? Can you guess what the six emotions are? Answer: happiness, anger, fear, distress, surprise and disgust.

Find some pictures (www.eltpics.com is a great resource for this – thousands of pictures taken by teachers, free for you to use in your classrooms). Choose pictures where the person is showing a strong emotion. Ask your learners to talk about the pictures, to decide what emotion the person is showing, and say why they think this is. If you choose pictures that are a little ambiguous, this will encourage further discussion and debate. Discuss the fact that there are only six universal emotions. Ask learners to guess what they are, and then talk about situations in

their lives where they have experienced one or other of these emotions (they were surprised, or angry....) and share their stories.

For this lesson I like to take the class outside, preferably to an area of green, a nearby park or garden. Just getting out of the classroom helps to free up their creative juices. Learners spend some time focusing on their senses and making notes about things that they can see, hear, feel or smell. Then we move on to writing poems. Here are some poems that my students wrote.

FIGURE 6: STUDENTS' POEMS
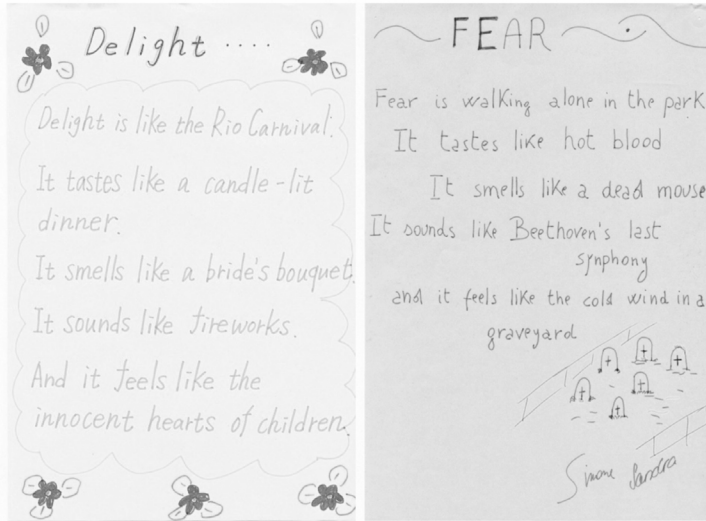
As you can see, we use a very simple framework to write the poem:

Emotion
_____ is like...
It tastes like...
It smells like...
It sounds like...
And it feels like...

In my experience, writing a poem using a framework like this can be very confidence-boosting for learners. Often learners have never written a poem in English, many have never written one in their own language. So given the framework, the language and the inspiration, they are often amazed by what they're able to achieve.

Some learners get quite carried away, they keep writing poems, or they take it one step further, by adding rhyme. Look at this example.

FIGURE 7: A STUDENT'S POEM
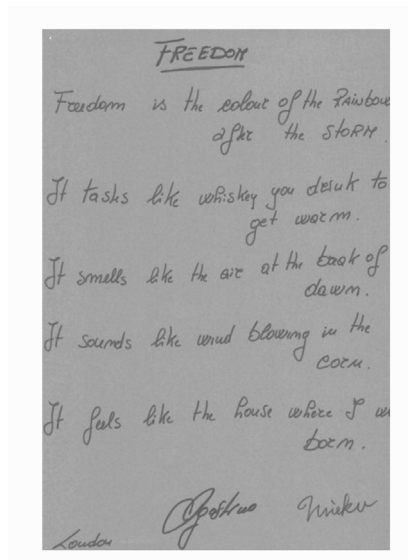
John Burnside (2012), talking about the importance of poetry says: "poetry is important because it makes us think, it opens us up to wonder at the sometimes astonishing possibilities of language."

A class happiness poem

If you're not sure about getting students to write individual poems, you could try writing a class poem first. Here's a very simple activity. Get your students to close their eyes and think of something that makes them happy. It can be anything: a special place, an activity they enjoy, a person they like to spend time with. Ask them to picture it in their mind's eye. Then ask them to open their eyes. They can talk to their partners about what makes them happy and why.

Write the following poem starter on the whiteboard. Use something that makes you happy as the first line of the poem.

HAPPINESS IS...
Happiness is walking barefoot on a windy beach,
Happiness is...
Happiness is...
Happiness is ...

Then ask your students to give you the next line of the poem, using the ideas they had. You'll see how very quickly you can come up with a lovely poem, which uses their own ideas. You can choose to focus on a specific grammar point (e.g. gerund for describing activities) or leave it open. It's up to you.

Talking memories

Have you ever had the experience where you notice a smell, and immediately it takes you back to a time from your childhood? The smell of freshly ground coffee does it for me, as I remember grinding coffee beans in a small, wooden coffee-grinder at home in my mother's kitchen. The senses can be powerful triggers for memories from our past. It's called the Proust effect, as evidenced by Marcel Proust in his book *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), and it can be very powerful to use in the classroom. Ask your learners to think back to sights, sounds and smells that they remember from their childhood.

Choose one of the memories and use it to write a description of the event. Learners can study a sample text, noticing the language used to describe the different senses. The following text (taken from *Speakout: Advanced,* Clare & Wilson, 2012) describes a tree from my own childhood. Perhaps you could write a short description of a sensory memory from your past and share the story with your learners.

FIGURE 8: THE FIG TREE

THE FIG TREE

I remember we used to visit my grandmother's house at weekends. It was a huge house with gardens leading down to a field, and it seemed almost like a palace to me. At the bottom of the field was an orchard, planted with apples, and twenty-one walnut trees. In the middle of the field stood an ancient fig tree. It was here, in the tree, that my cousins and I would sit and play for hours on end. I can remember the smell of the green leaves, the sticky sap that would leak from the leaves and the figs as they ripened. We each had our own special branch and we would climb up and then sit looking out over the countryside. I can almost feel the warmth of the sun on our faces and the feeling of safety and security as we hid among the branches. In that tree, we would sit and chatter about life, feast on the sweet, crunchy apples, hold meetings, tell jokes, read books, make plans, have fig fights and discuss what we wanted to be when we grew up. The fig tree knew all our secrets.

When I was twelve, my grandmother moved into a small flat and we stopped going to the house. But a few years ago, I was in the area, so I drove back there to see if it was how I had remembered it. The house was almost unrecognisable. It had been turned into a doctor's surgery, with signposts all around and cars parked all over the drive. The gardens had been redesigned, and there were pathways to walk along and benches to sit on and enjoy the views. Gone was my grandmother's wild flower garden. But behind the house, in the middle of the field, just as if time had never passed, stood the fig tree, full of lush green leaves, and juicy figs. Its branches hung heavily towards the ground, almost beckoning me to climb up. Just standing in the field brought all the memories of my grandmother and our life there flooding back to me. And touching the smooth bark on the trunk, it was all I could do to resist sprinting to the end of the field to pick an apple or two and then back to the fig tree to enjoy the rest of the warm afternoon.

Write a description of one of the events. Add details of how you felt, why it was special.

Remember to include all the senses. Describe sounds (using onomatopoeia), smells, tastes and textures.

Ask learners to write a description of a scene from their own childhood, focusing specifically on the details of why the memory is so special, and the rich language used for describing the different senses.

ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY

These are just a few ways in which we might try to engage learners in activities that unlock their creativity, developing their ability to think creatively. We have looked at the following:

Creating stories and poems
Response frameworks
Engaging the emotions
Activating the senses
Thinking time
Imagery as a prompt
Visualisation
Elaboration and adding detail

It's so important to try to be creative in your teaching, even when it's hard to fit it in with everything else you are supposed to do, because creative teaching is real, passionate teaching. Creativity is at the heart of genuine learning. You can teach objectives, but if you fail to engage the learners' creative processes, then the real learning is likely not to be there. Creative communication comes from the heart, so getting learners to communicate something that is meaningful to them, that is valuable and holds a personal significance, will encourage a deeper kind of learning.

In addition to that, in terms of your own teacher development, if you ignore creativity in the way that you teach, you are possibly denying yourself valuable opportunities for self-development. So, it may be difficult, and time-consuming, but it's worth it. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Almost always, the creative, dedicated minority have made the world better."

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Critical and creative thinking in the ELT classroom

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The need to promote critical and creative thinking skills in the ELT classroom is often recognized as a key learning objective. A growing body of research suggests that both educators and students with diverse learning needs and predispositions benefit from the activation and implementation of higher order thinking skills. In addition, the inclusion of complex cognitive tasks is said to result in more engaging, motivating and stimulating lessons. In view of this, this paper primarily refers to the theory behind incorporating higher order thinking skills in the ELT classroom. Moreover, the workshop it is based on largely took a hands-on approach that sought to discuss different ways of infusing, implementing and integrating such skills in the ELT classroom by means of effective, meaningful and challenging tasks. Particular emphasis was made on the transition between critical thinking and learners' creativity, i.e. learners' ability to process information as conducive to designing or composing something new.

BACKGROUND

As suggested by Stepanak (2015), "Creativity is a complex field" (p. 98) that has been examined from several different perspectives. The "difficulty of finding an inclusive definition" (Maley, 2015, p. 6) for creativity may be owing to the latter's diverse forms and manifestations. Moreover, Maley (2015) identifies a number of features that are inherent to virtually all creative acts. Among others, these features include the fact that creativity is an easily recognizable and beneficial act. In fact, Maley (2015) comments on creativity's tendency "to improve student self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness", which feelings in turn result in "more committed and more effective learning" (p. 9). In this sense, creativity may be seen as an invigorating and stimulating experience. Another recurring belief alluded to by Maley (2015) is the idea that creativity constitutes the act of "making something new" (p. 7). Here Maley (2015) highlights the fact that novelty need not imply creativity. Rather, novelty must be exploited further for creativity to ensue. This fact was addressed in our workshop by means of a task that enabled the participants to reflect on that which results in creative practice and that which merely demonstrates novelty in one's delivery.

The relationship between critical and creative thinking

In defining creativity, it is also imperative to distinguish between creative and critical thinking respectively, two processes which as Maley (2015) outlines, are often confused. Indeed, Maley (2015) suggests that while the two processes may at times overlap, there are several differences between the two. For instance, although problem-solving may entail improvising and "making unusual connections", it may "also be conducted in a purely logical, rational way which has little in common with creative processes" (Maley, 2015, p. 8).

The overlap between critical and creative thinking was addressed in the first task we carried out with the audience. Here participants were given a set of sticky notes and an A3 cardboard paper that was divided into two columns labelled critical thinking and creativity respectively. Participants were then asked to work in groups of three and together come up with a list of tasks, activities and subskills that could be used to satisfy each of the two skills. While some of the participants could clearly and easily decipher that which is purely creative and that which constitutes critical thinking, one participant raised the argument that some tasks could fall under both categories since critical thinking may also involve an element of creativity.

Apart from conveying similarities and differences between creativity and critical thinking, this task helped reinforce the fact that the discovery process may still be a creative one and that learners should be encouraged to come up with a creative solution to a problem. The degree of overlap between creativity and critical thinking may be seen to coincide with Papalazarou's definition of creativity. According to Papalazarou (2015) "Creativity...is present not only in terms of a

product, but in a process that promotes a more open, curious and questioning relationship to others and to the world" (p. 37). In view of this, the term creativity was used interchangeably throughout the workshop to refer to its implementation as a process, i.e. the manner in which critical thinking tasks and creative tasks are carried out on one hand, and as the final product of students' output on the other respectively.

Maley's principles as a framework for fostering creativity

Furthermore, our workshop employed Maley's (2015) definition of creativity as a phenomenon that is "born of discipline and thrives in a context of constraints" (p. 6). More specifically, Maley's (2015) principles were implemented as a framework since these principles were deemed ideal for fostering creativity in the ELT classroom. This framework was employed at different levels throughout the workshop. Firstly, it shaped the type of tasks that were given to the audience. Secondly, it was used as a foundation on which the participants present at the workshop, could plan a creative and well-structured lesson. Finally, it featured in the model lesson plan of an integrated skills lesson we presented at the final stage of the workshop.

Prior to demonstrating our own examples, members of the audience were asked to use some of the principles in this framework in order to plan a lesson. In order to do this, the audience were primarily exposed to Maley's (2015) framework and given a brief description of what each principle entails. At this stage, we stressed the fact that one may opt to make use of all or some of these principles within a single lesson and to varying degrees depending on their aims and objectives. In addition, each principle may in turn be realised in several ways.

In essence, Maley's (2015) principles suggest the teacher's use of heuristics at all levels, the implementation of constraints, the use of randomness, forming associations, using feeder fields, incorporating withholding-information tasks, promoting divergent-thinking and making extensive use of readily available materials. The principle of heuristics encourages the exploration and experimentation with conventional practices in the classroom. This principle, as Maley (2015) conveys, may not only be applied to activities, but also to the delivery of a lesson or execution of an activity. This allows the teacher to be a reflective and evaluative practitioner, who experiments with new strategies and ideas to identify their effectiveness.

The constraint principle also outlined by Maley (2015, p. 11) in turn reflects the need to provide a constraint, without which creativity would not ensue. This is reminiscent of Boden (1990) who states that "Far from being the antithesis of creativity, constraints on thinking are what make it possible" (p. 82).

Similarly, the withholding information principle presented by Maley (2015, p. 11) as the amount of information revealed to the learner also determines the balance between creating a constraint and allowing enough space from which the flow

of creativity may follow. Thus providing enough constraints without exceedingly restricting the learner's freedom to be creative is part of generating a suitable environment that fosters the learner's creativity.

A supportive and creative environment is also developed through the teacher's use of evocative stimuli to which students' reactions are prompted; a core element of the association principle. This poses an interesting contrast with the notion of randomness put forward by Maley (2015), which involves "putting two or more things together that do not belong together and finding connections between them" (p. 11). In our presentation the random principle was also adapted to denote a sense of unpredictability and an element of surprise experienced by the learners. Moreover, the connections mentioned in Maley's (2015) randomness principle may be facilitated through the incorporation of the divergent thinking principle, which encourages the teacher to apply and encourage alternative and varied practices. The latter is also evocative of the need "to respond in the moment to the unpredictability as the action unfolds", a notion which Maley (2015) deems the "kind of reactive creativity [that] complements the proactive creativity of the activities the teacher offers" (p. 7). Furthermore, Maley (2015) also recognises the importance of "feeder fields" (p. 11), whereby a teacher can make use of domains other than ELT to enrich the practices in the ELT classroom.

A REFLECTION ON THE TASKS, STRATEGIES AND FRAMEWORK USED

The looping strategy

The looping strategy was adopted so that the audience could be given ample thinking space and enabled to reflect on their own practices in the classroom. Moreover, the use of looping also meant that the audience was asked to engage both critically and creatively in the tasks at hand. This is in keeping with Maley's (2015) idea that "It is no good preaching creativity to our students unless we also practise it ourselves" (p. 7).

The distinction between teachers' creativity and fostering students' creativity

Maley (2015) accounts for several sources of creativity that are at the teacher's discretion and that could be fully exploited in order to cultivate students' creativity in the ELT classroom. These resources range from our immediate surroundings, namely the classroom; readily available material, such as coursebooks and online resources; other authentic materials, such as newspapers and songs, activities, strategies and techniques employed by teachers; and finally the teacher and the students themselves.

Indeed, the degree of creativity demonstrated by the students is highly dependent on the ways in which the teacher exploits his or her sources. Tapping

into students' needs, preferences, interests and abilities and coming up with highly creative, interactive and meaningful tasks enables teachers to create relevant and motivating lessons that stimulate the learners' creativity. The need for teachers to indulge in creative and reflective practice is expressed by Maley (2015) who states that "If we want the bread to rise, we need to provide the yeast" (p. 7). This also resonates with Stevick (1980) who claims that "we should judge creativity in the classroom by what the teacher makes it possible for the student to do, not just by what the teacher does" (p. 12).

The audience at the workshop discovered this line of thought by means of a critical thinking task which required the participants to first read a short extract taken from Starko (2014) and then respond to the text in different ways. Similar to Maley (2015) and Stevick (1980), Starko (2014) outlines that "creative teaching (the teacher is creative) is not the same as teaching to develop creativity" (p. 20). While the two are not mutually exclusive, this statement leads us to question several teaching practices or activities we may choose to adopt in the classroom. In fact, Starko (2014) uses some of the lessons she has encountered or been presented with to exemplify the distinction between teachers' creativity in designing and executing an activity and the latter's ability to foster creativity amongst learners.

One of Starko's (2014) striking examples which was also used as an extract in our workshop is a lesson wherein "the teacher took the class outside...brought out a parachute and proceeded to show [the students] how the chute could be used to create various forms – a flower, an ocean wave and other shapes" (p. 19). Furthermore, while the teacher narrated a story, the students followed "a tightly choreographed series of moves" and transformed the chute into various shapes "to accompany the story" (Starko, 2015, p. 19). Being one of the learners in the lesson allowed Starko (2014) to evaluate the amount of creativity the activity allowed her to demonstrate. During our presentation we sought to allow the members in the audience to undergo this critical process. After presenting them with the parachute activity as a context, participants were asked to describe the lesson from the learner's perspective and to discuss whether they as learners were being creative.

Some of the participants reached the conclusion that while the teacher was creative in her delivery, the learners did not generate any creative output. This is in keeping with Starko's (2014) observation. Although Starko (2014) does not negate that the teacher was very innovative in creating the lesson, she questions the degree of creativity that was demonstrated by the learners. Empathising with the learner and perceiving the lesson from the learner's perspective in turn allowed us to seek ways in which this lesson could be adapted to foster creativity amongst learners in the ELT classroom. As a result, audience members were then asked to think of ways in which the latter lesson could be adapted to foster students' creativity in the ELT classroom whilst using the imperative. Participants were then given the opportunity to share their ideas with the rest of the audience.

This was followed by a presentation of our own ideas which suggested that

following the teacher's demonstration, students may be asked to work in groups, create a story of their own and use the imperative to instruct their fellow students to create different shapes that accompany their story. Students would thus be creating their own story while using the imperative to instruct their peers. By means of this task, the audience were able to make use of higher order thinking skills which took the form of empathizing with the students, retelling the story from a students' perspective and concluding that the teacher's creativity did not lead to the students being creative themselves. This task was exploited further so that the participants were then asked to think of alternative ways in which the teacher could ensure that the students would be creative.

It is the very same importance of distinguishing between teachers' and students' creativity that reinforces the need to emphasise the interrelatedness between these two factors. In fact, Pishghadam, Baghaei and Shayesteh (2012) echo Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) ideas when they claim "that teachers may be important gatekeepers of learners' creative potentials and seek to develop and validate a creativity scale for non-native English language teachers...to assess how much teachers' activities, strategies, and behaviors in the class cultivate the learners' creative thought" (p. 497). Thus, teachers may find creative ways of fostering learner's creativity.

Lesson planning with Maley's principles

The final task took the form of a lesson planning session using Maley's (2015) principles, which "can be used to develop various forms of creativity" (p. 10). In accordance with Maley's (2015) principle of constraints, participants were given highly contextualized and specific instructions. Pictures of two people – later named Rachel and Tom by the audience – were beamed up on the presentation.

We explained that Rachel and Tom were both English language teachers who were usually very creative in the classroom and that each of them had come across a resource they wanted to use in their class but lacked ideas as to how they could use them creatively. At this point, the audience was divided into two groups. Group A were asked to help Rachel who had a text about reading houses (https://goo.gl/JNWHFE) but did not quite know how to incorporate the text creatively in her lesson. Alternatively, Group B were asked to help Tom who needed the audience's help to plan a lesson using a video clip depicting strange houses (https://goo.gl/dZCeNk). Both groups were asked to plan a lesson aimed at B1 level learners of English using the given prompts. Each group was further divided into smaller subgroups of 3 members. Moreover, each group was given a handout outlining the chosen principles followed by a space in which to list their activities, tasks and time limits. After allowing participants 15 minutes to plan their lessons, a space was created for a plethora of ideas to be exchanged.

In the discussion that followed, it became evident that Maley's (2015) principles presented the teachers with an ideal foundation on which to build their lessons.

As suggested earlier, the aim behind this task was not to provide a prescriptive set of rules or instructions on which to base one's lessons. Rather the key aim was to provide teachers with an effective tool or scaffold that could be manipulated and exploited in different ways so as to achieve the desired outcomes. This satisfies Maley's (2015) constraint principle, which aims to direct and guide the audience accordingly. Each principle was realised through different tasks and to different degrees. For instance, some participants suggested a number of tasks that pertained to two principles while others suggested a task for each principle respectively.

The final stage of the workshop enabled us to convey how some of these principles could be put into effect in an integrated skills lesson about houses. The suggested tasks exemplified the use of the constraints principle, the association principle, the withholding information principle, and the divergent thinking principle, respectively. The constraints principle could be implemented by means of setting time limits for each task, giving learners specific instructions and contextualizing a task. In addition, an association task may take the form of matching houses to character types and asking learners to identify which features are an essential part of one's home and think about how this may reflect a person's character.

A withholding information task could require students to design a plan of their ideal house and take it in turns to describe their plan to each other while drawing their partner's plan. This picture dictation task could be used to get learners to practice using prepositions of place. Alternatively, students may engage in a jigsaw reading activity wherein they complete a table to solve a mystery by finding out who is living in the different houses in a particular street. Moreover, a withholding information task can be used to reinforce target vocab. This could be done by means of half-a-crossword puzzle dealing with household vocabulary. Having drawn a plan of their ideal house, the teacher may wish to introduce an element of randomness by asking students to then swap drawings with their partner and try to convince their partner or other class members to buy it. Finally, the divergent thinking principle could be realised by means of giving students a list of objects one finds in a house and asking students to think of alternative uses for these objects.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Throughout our workshop, we sought to ensure that the activities we suggested were highly student-centred, catered for diverse learning styles and could be adapted to suit learners of different ages and levels. The incorporation of Maley's (2015) principles as a framework in our presentation proved ideal since the latter may suit the needs of a mixed ability classroom. We also ensured that a highly collaborative, dynamic and safe atmosphere was created since the latter is often proposed as a means of fostering creativity in the classroom.

As teachers of English we wanted to make use of a strategy that would enable teachers to engage in the same tasks that their learners would undertake in the classroom. However, we also sought to do this while probing and questioning the audience in a manner that would allow them to become aware of the effectiveness of such tasks. We wanted to encourage members in the audience to create a space in their lessons that would stimulate students to think critically, reflect and form their own ideas, challenge and question and engage in divergent thinking. The need to incorporate critical and creative thinking tasks in one's lessons is best captured by Tomlinson (2003), who states that "Students given the opportunity to exercise their own creativity tend to respond positively" (p. 187).

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Recalibrating the teacher's position as writer: using stimulus-materials for a more creative ELT classroom

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This paper considers the role of teacher-writers and how this can shape their expectations of student-writers. A convergence between the position of teachers-as-writers and the use of stimulus-materials is also suggested. One aim is to explore the potential of print and digital stimulus-materials in the promotion of writing in the ELT classroom and beyond. An offshoot of this research is to encourage teachers and students to perceive writing as enjoyable, while bolstering their creativity via target-specific writing opportunities. Positioning themselves as writers can enable teachers to better understand their students, who are asked to write as well as to cultivate a community of creative practice.

THE TEACHER–AS–WRITER: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

One of the assets of learning ELT professionals is their ability to self-reflect and to question their attitudes towards teaching. For instance, when choosing the teaching profession, many prospective teachers indicated a positive attitude towards reading for pleasure (Cremin, 2006). However, this did not translate into a passion for writing, which is corroborated by research that teachers of English do not perceive writing as positively as reading (Cremin, 2006; Gannon & Davies, 2007; Peel, 2000). In connection with this issue, one of the premises of this paper is the necessity for teachers to consider a possible mind-shift and see themselves as being writing teachers in the classroom before being teachers of English. By stepping into their students' shoes, they would better recognize the challenges and the rewards of writing. An outcome of this is that teachers would "confront themselves with what they already know" (Shin, 2003, p. 3) and, in so doing, better grasp the demands of writing. Ideally this process would have begun in the teacher education stage, whereby journals are kept and subsequently used as a "tool for self-reflection" (Shin, 2003, p. 4). However, it is possible for any teacher, from a novice to an experienced one, to be continuously introspective. While teachers gain "an increased awareness...of their own writing style and habits", they are also able to better understand students' difficulties in writing, which may result in issues such as "procrastination" (Shin, 2003, pp. 7-8).

Being more aware of one's writing style would motivate teachers not to shy away from spontaneous writing in class. This type of writing does not happen often, as it has been noted that "the majority of the teachers...assiduously prepared such writing at home" (Grainger, 2005, p. 80). This hinges on their awareness of unplanned writing being a daunting act that requires one to go through processes of drafting, editing, and proofreading. So by writing *before* the lesson, teachers claim control of this creative exercise. However, it takes away the joys and perils that one gets from writing in class alongside their students; it also does not allow the latter to get an insight into the thinking process that teachers would be engaged in. Instead, teachers prepare and plan the lessons for writing meticulously at home and then in class they would "pretend" to write for the first time (Cremin & Baker, 2010). Moreover, when teachers are "anxious about their own writing abilities" they consequently "struggle with teaching writing", which means that there is "a higher likelihood of giving up when faced with student writing challenges" (Tracy, Scales, & Nancy, 2014, p. 71). This situation partly explains the lack of confidence to write in class.

Studies on perception of writing ability reveal that teachers who had negative experiences and memories of writing felt less confident in writing instruction. However, it was conceded that perceptions are "malleable" which means that, with proper training, teachers' perceptions and confidence levels in writing may be enhanced (Tracy et. al., 2014, p. 74). In relation to this, Cremin and Baker (2014) assert that when "teachers develop their confidence as writers and model writing in class, their attitudes to teaching writing improve" (p. 32). Their research on

teacher-writer identities also demonstrated that "the teachers' relationships with their unfolding writing, emotional engagement with each composition, and degree of authenticity and authorial agency experienced, impacted upon their positioning as teachers and writers in the classroom" (Cremin & Baker, 2014, p. 33). This is linked to the position teachers adopt in the classroom.

Recalibrating teachers' position in the classroom calls for structures wherein teachers can hone their skills as writers, so that writing alongside students would be an activity that teachers look forward to. To achieve this, research projects are set up involving teachers writing together. For instance, a number of initiatives such as writing programmes in the UK (e.g. We're Writers, or Writing is Primary (WisP)) and in the US (e.g. the National Writing Project) have been promoting the training of teachers as writers. These programmes offer "a very secure writing environment" while promoting "a more collegial working atmosphere" (Grainger, 2005, p. 79). It is important for teachers to avail themselves of "the learning entitlement" that should include writing (Cremin, 2006, p. 432). The aim is to help those who have yet to explore their "sense of self" and find more confidence in writing (Grainger, 2005, p. 77).

After taking part in a writing programme for teachers by teachers, collaborative writing in class with students would be attempted. The teacher's role in the classroom would change from an observer and mentor, to an active participant in the thinking and writing processes. The teachers may write alongside students, or may organize activities where they create a written piece together with their students. Based on and referring to former research into collaborative writing, Millan (2005) recommends the following stages that co-writers can be involved in:

1. Reaching an agreement about the kind of text they would like to produce;
2. Modifying the text during the process of writing it;
3. Offering each other ideas and suggestions about both content and phrasing;
4. Repeatedly reading the text aloud in order to reach agreement about final phrasing and;
5. Repeatedly rereading and revising the text. (p. 336)

The interesting outcomes of this approach are the following: (i) teachers can negotiate with students what text they would like to create, and (ii) the stages enable teachers to model writing in front of their students. Moreover, it is recommended that students be 'supported' during the writing task so as to "develop their abilities to be autonomous writers in other social situations"; these "conditions" could help "to build bridges between writers and writing teachers" (Millan, 2005, p. 349). All this ties in with research on writing and creativity (Grainger, Goouch, & Lambirth, 2005), on "uncertainty" and "discomfort" (Cremin, 2006), and on "teachers' identities as writers" (Cremin & Baker, 2010). The consequent study of writing projects in the US has proved that "writing together had further benefits" (Smith

& Wrigley, 2012, p. 71). For instance, teachers "discover things about themselves as learners" and "it engages them intellectually in their profession again" (Andrews, 2008, p. 37). This is linked to the principle that "engaged students appear to be motivated by the pursuit of pleasure" (Nance, 2010, p. 23). Writing therefore needs to be reconceptualised as a pleasurable activity rather than one that might be causing anxiety and frustration to students and teachers alike. This is where stimulus-materials come in; they serve to bolster teachers' and student writers' thinking and creative processes. The next section explores the area of stimulus-materials and suggests some activities.

THE ROLE OF STIMULUS-MATERIALS

Stimulus-materials can be "visual, verbal and/or auditory"; they are utilized to "communicate certain ideas...or to stimulate discussion of relevant topics" (AQR, 2015). Here I suggest how these materials and prompts can serve as inspiration for writing so that two areas merge: teacher-as-writers and stimulus-materials. The reason for using stimulus-materials is partly to inspire teachers and students to write, while defining clearer boundaries for the foci, the contexts and the aims of the writing activity. Moreover, stimulus materials help to "elicit information that might otherwise be hidden" (dobney.com, 2010), thus prompting ideas for writing. Stimulus materials could also be utilized for different purposes, such as to gather reactions and responses from participants. For instance, Xerri (in press) used poetry as stimulus material for qualitative research purposes, with the result that it enhanced the interview experience and process. Whether it is for teaching, writing, or research purpposes, it is useful to remember the following principles of good stimulus material:

1. It is substantive and worth examining closely;
2. It is likely to be of interest to the target audience;
3. It is optimally challenging, not too hard or too easy;
4. It offers opportunity for searching questions;
5. It is self-contained. (Anderson & Morgan, 2008, p. 31)

Traditional textbooks are the first port of call for many teachers, but these too can serve as stimulus material by adapting the images or prompts provided. Together with this medium, there are other options available in print or digital format. The latter is more conducive for students who are digital natives, as they communicate via this format on a daily basis. This links to an important tenet of using stimulus-materials: authenticity. In a project entitled 'Writers Who Care', researchers advocate authentic writing "for real audiences and real purposes" (Zuidema, Hochstetler, Letcher, & Hawley Turner, 2014, p. 81). One of the project's tenets is that "authentic writing enables an influential student learning experience because it connects the writer and audience in ways that have significance for the

writer" (Zuidema et al., 2014, p. 82). This means that while accounting for syllabi and textbook constraints, it is essential to ensure that writing is done for a genuine purpose or it will be another 'chore' added to the students' list of duties. This will undermine the whole point of writing that could be communicative, collaborative and creative; artificial tasks will also impede students and teachers from enjoying writing.

To achieve enjoyment in writing, students can also be encouraged to share their writing with one another, and teachers to share theirs with students (or other teachers). Expanding the intended reading audience would mean that the writing would not be "constrained to issues important only to the teacher", for this would limit students' "investment in writing decisions", as well as the "relevance and impact of their writing experience" (Zuidema et. al, 2014, p. 82). For this reason, stimulus-materials for writing purposes need to be relevant, meaningful, and interesting to students and teachers alike.

Stimulus-material ideas: practical examples

Examples of stimulus-material activities to inspire teachers as writers and their students are presented in the table below:

TABLE 1: STIMULUS-MATERIALS FOR WRITING PURPOSES

Type of stimulus-material	Type of writing	Procedure
Using Twitter	Practising conciseness in writing	Students and their teacher discuss trending topics online and practise responding to current affairs stories in a tweet (140 characters). Teachers and students then share their tweet.
Tapping into one's experiences by using a voice recorder (most students have a Smartphone nowadays, which means they have a voice recorder)	Writing about an incident and creating a short story around it	Teachers and students talk about something that made them angry or happy during that week. First they record it and edit it. This could be the basis for a short story. Students can also work in pairs; they each tell one another a story and together they rewrite them.

Using the Goodreads website or app	Writing a book review	Teachers and students read a few book reviews and discuss their style. They compare some well-written reviews as opposed to poorly written ones. Based on a book of their choice, teachers and students proceed to write a book review. Then they share it with the class (they can upload it on the website; if they do not have an account, they may create one).
Using literature as a stimulus-material (poems on websites such as poetrystation.org or poetry archives)	Writing a poem or passage to respond to a situation in a poem	Students can be encouraged to look up poems or prose passages. The lesson would be a creative writing workshop during which teachers and students respond to a poem they have chosen by writing their reactions in paragraph form or as another poem. For example, if there is a problematic situation or conflict in the poem, students write an answer to that conflict.
Real-life situations	Responding to a situation via email or long message	Students discuss certain situations that are relevant to their life at the moment and are asked to write a response to one of those in email or long message format. The purpose of this would be to practise different examples of formal and informal writing (emails) for realistic situations that students and teachers encounter in real life.
Use of photography and images to inspire descriptive writing	Descriptive writing	Descriptive writing can be linked to areas such as marketing, creative writing, and report writing. Alternatively, teachers could ask students to look for photos on their phone, discuss their favourite ones and then choose one as a stimulus to write a paragraph inspired by the image. It might be a person, a place, or something more abstract.

More stimulus-materials ideas

As suggested by the AQR (2015), here are additional materials that can be further adapted and used by teacher-as-writers to promote writing hubs in the classroom:

1. **Storyboard:** using materials in the form of sketches for a TV advertisement. Students are shown or asked to create storyboard, and then write a script to accompany the storyboard.
2. **Mood board**: this format of visual material consists of boards with images that are aimed at presenting or embodying moods and atmosphere (the teacher and students can make use of apps such as Pinterest for this purpose). Teachers and students can then respond to the mood board in writing.
3. **Animatic**: this form of stimulus material involves cartoons. However, what the teachers and students can do is to find comics and rewrite the dialogue or script for the images. This would be another collaborative writing activity.

POSITIONING MYSELF AS A TEACHER-WRITER

During my lessons, I have often explored my identity as teacher-writer and the role of stimulus-materials to aid this process. For some time now I have been reflecting on and rethinking my position as a writing teacher, which prompted me to start writing alongside my students when the occasion presented itself. During a number of sessions where students are engaged in paragraph writing, I realized that they watch me write. This assuages their anxiety and encourages them to finish the paragraph. After we write, I show them my edited writing and then we briefly discuss the processes and outcomes. I then read my piece and ask them to read theirs; they feel less daunted to do so after they see me 'go first'. In a way I provide them with a model *in vivo*. When I first started doing this I asked students to comment on the result; they remarked that it was a surprise for them to see the teacher write spontaneously since they are accustomed to teachers' writing being pre-planned or pre-written before class.

In this way, students become aware of how editing takes place, as I show them the draft and final paragraph respectively. They realize that it takes time to refine the writing product. My aim is to also teach them the perseverance and patience one requires when writing and editing a piece, which explains why this skill is a discipline. Moreover, I focus on the fact that authentic writing "matters" because it renders "the writing decisions more complex", "the urgency more pressing", and makes "the learning more relevant and powerful" (Zuidema et. al, 2014, p. 82). Finally, I encourage my students to write for other audiences other than the teacher and classmates so as to include "others beyond the walls of the classroom" (Zuidema et. al, 2014, p. 82).

CONCLUSION

Teachers who write are also constantly learning about writing. They understand the difficulties that the process brings with it, namely the waves of editing, self-correction, and proofreading required to finalize a well-written piece. What is expected of student-writers is suddenly given a new perspective. At the same time, however, there will be moments where the inspiration to write strikes, and to write then is to act. Hence, it is crucial to find the time and space for this writing to happen, and not stifle one's voice as a writer. While reflecting on this point, teachers need to see themselves as writers before perceiving themselves as teachers *of* writing. Writing *is* creative so there is potential for teachers to be creative. Teaching students writing means, by extension, teaching them how to be creative.

In order for the above to take place, however, teachers have to wholeheartedly believe that there is room for the above elements, and model more creative behaviour. It is suggested that teachers avail themselves of a number of techniques that would enable them to write alongside their students. This does not mean writing a 500-word essay in one sitting, albeit the fact that we do expect students at times to produce that type of writing under examination conditions. This possibly daunting task may put the challenges of writing into a new light, so that as writing teachers we become more conscious and understanding of what students have to go through (often in an attempt to make the grade). This chimes with what Smith and Wrigley (2012) say about the act of writing:

> Writing exposes us in so many ways, so it is hard to write and even harder to share. However, although most people have stories to tell about the ways in which their writing was ridiculed in some way, or how their writing unwittingly caused unhappiness, most have also experienced some of its pleasures. (p. 74).

Despite the fact that writing is just one medium of expression out of many, Smith and Wrigley's (2012) reflection is in itself a lesson for creative teachers, encouraging them to embrace writing as a pleasure rather than see it as a chore. Channelling this into their daily practice may lead teachers to help students achieve one of the most rewarding outcomes: to engage in creativity for life.

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Literature in the ELT classroom: "No way, José!" or "Oh yes, s'il vous plaît!"?

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Apart from making lessons more interesting and creative, engaging students with literature as part of a language course can help them become more aware of the rich potential of language and how it is used creatively to represent meaning in so many different ways. With the practical application of pedagogical stylistics, teachers can grade literature-based tasks based on authentic literary texts (left in the original), to guide students through a series of pre-, first, second, and post-reading questions and exercises that require them to use a range of lower- to higher-order thinking skills. This ultimately takes them from surface comprehension to a deeper understanding of the text, ending in guided co-/reproduction of their own. This empowers them as both readers and active users of the language.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a workshop delivered at the 4th ELT Malta Conference. The title of the workshop presented the participants, in their role as ELT practitioners, with the question of whether or not literature, however it is to be understood and whatever it is taken to stand for, should be integrated in the English language classroom. In fact, the general attitude towards the subject was gauged shortly after the aims and outcomes of the workshop were outlined, and, with a show of hands, the teachers present were invited to admit to adamant opposition on the one hand, eager interest and approval on the other, and indifference or openness to conversion somewhere in between. Some of the pros and cons that emerged from the introductory discussion will be debated below.

The aim of the workshop was for teachers to be introduced to a non-theoretical and very accessible understanding of pedagogical stylistics and its potential for practical application and customisation to a specific target audience in the language classroom, i.e. to explore how authentic literary texts can be used in teachers' own classes with their own students for the purpose of a more holistic and enhanced *language* learning experience (where the focus is not on study or assessment of the literary content itself). The outcome was therefore to allow teachers to take away an easily usable toolkit with a clear step-by-step guide, and a desire to try it out with their students.

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST USING AUTHENTIC LITERARY LANGUAGE

The principle behind a discussion like this falls in line with an increased interest in creativity in ELT and an invitation to teachers to make both learning and the process of lesson preparation more innovative, for their students' and their own benefit. Putting course book extracts and graded readers aside in exchange for authentic, unabridged texts (in no way doctored or otherwise tampered with), brings in a lot more language than teachers are usually prepared to teach and than is offered by adapted renditions where the language is typically simplified to cater to a foreign language proficiency level (for example Intermediate or B1 on the CEFR), so that what students get is a watered down, artificial version of English which lacks all the flow and authenticity of the original and would never satisfy a native speaker.

The convenience of graded language for both teachers and students is that there is less likely to be an untimely encounter with vocabulary or grammar structures too high above students' own level to confuse them and hinder comprehension or progress (e.g. complex or purposely untidy syntax, irregular punctuation or sentence length, verbose or elaborate phrases with stacked modifiers etc.), as pausing over each and every new word or unfamiliar structure would obviously ruin the whole experience and defeat the purpose of learner-empowering, semi-autonomous engagement with the text. After all, how can

one explain poetic licence (which sometimes allows the very opposite of what prescriptive grammar dictates) to students who are still coming to terms with the basic rules of the language, without resulting in confusion for the student and regret for the teacher?

Nevertheless, as far as creativity goes, there is still something to be said for importing authentic literary language into class, as more pathways are automatically opened up for individual and teacher-monitored exploration. What happens is that in the process of searching for basic meaning, students start to pay attention to the finer details of literary-linguistic expression and its creative effect. As a result, even though a teacher can and should plan (and even base the choice of text on) which specific language to focus on with respect to students' particular needs or in line with the timetable or syllabus fit, there is no knowing where the analysis and discussion it stimulates can lead as students are guided through the reading to a point where they are given freer reign of what to make of the text and, in the final stages of such exercises, what to do with it themselves. This inevitably makes literature-based language lessons more flexible and, consequently, more promising in terms of learner engagement and overall effectiveness, than is often otherwise permitted in the limited confines of graded materials with their plain, simple, too-correct language contrived specifically to expose students of a certain level to a set of pre-chosen words and structures (assimilation minus creativity).

Teachers reluctant to include literature in a language course meant to teach language and improve language proficiency, usually, with an emphasis on communicative skills, may also express concern regarding the apparent cultural irrelevance of literary texts' content to students for whom English literature is and will remain foreign because it does not stem from or reflect their own social and cultural reality, possibly serving to further alienate students from the target language. Having said that, the culture of the target language (which does not necessarily equate to a target culture if it is not students' intention to immerse themselves in it long-term and have it become like their own) could, on the other hand, enrich their learning experience and make it more holistic by giving the language contextual backing.

Moreover, within the many genres of modern and contemporary English fiction, there are plenty of different examples of universally themed texts that deal with the human condition in general, rather than with the peculiarities of a certain society (beyond more or less superficial details of place). This may perhaps be less evident in more historical texts, where the outdated or archaic language used and any historically irrelevant issues raised situate the text very much in its time, thereby creating a greater geographical and temporal distance which make it less accessible to the modern-day reader and even more so to the modern-day foreign reader. Generally speaking, more recent texts might better serve to make students reading English literature in the original feel, as a more immediate audience, like they are citizens of a global community reading a text in a global language which is not restricted to a native readership.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The traditional division between language and literature, not only in the context of foreign language teaching but also at all levels of study (including tertiary education where the two are relegated to separate academic disciplines), has been discussed in literary theory (refer to Russian Formalism), in light of the debatable existence of a literary language. In this respect, literature is regarded generically as a distinct and self-contained brand of language, what Carter (1997) refers to as a supposedly "unproblematic category" (p. 123). Language, on the other hand, in its literal and non-literary sense, is seen as a comprehensive umbrella category for everything else. This assumption would imply that literature has nothing to offer the student who simply wants to learn general-purpose language, as though language is not itself the very medium through which literature is produced.

Such a fearful reaction to literature comes from an oversimplification, in which it is equated exclusively to the venerable canon, with its long and respectable legacy of untouchable masterpieces; simply put, literature with a capital 'L' (McRae, 1991). It is therefore no wonder that many would see it as the intimidating domain of only the most able of native speakers, and nowhere the average, unassuming, moderately ambitious learner (simply after a decent level of communicative competence) would ever dare venture, let alone aspire to experiment with (as suggested in the post-reading exercises to be discussed).

This is where pedagogical stylistics and its lay-teacher-friendly practical application comes in to bring learners closer to literary texts by presenting them in a level-appropriate way while retaining their authentic original form. As Brazil (1983, as cited in Carter, 1986) states, "Possibly the best way of fostering a pupil's sensitivity to literature is...by encouraging him to see literary language as continuous with, and deriving its power to move from, his total language experience" (p. 118). After all, "literature is made from language which is its medium" (Carter, 1986, p. 110), so it would be "naive to suppose that literature is any different from other language use" (Birch, 1989, p. 258).

Carter (1996) adds that to leave creativity out of the language taught to students is to "misrepresent what speakers actually do and simultaneously to lose an opportunity for interesting language awareness work" (p. 10). In fact, this is what often happens in graded constructs in course books, both written and oral (short articles, biographical information, magazine-style features, radio interviews, comical video clips etc.), where the language used is often displayed as a *prescriptive* model for students' assimilation, e.g. genre-appropriate phrases (how to introduce a change in topic, how to ask someone for help in an email), informal greetings, polite social exchanges etc. Such language is contrived based on what is widely believed to be linguistically correct and situationally appropriate.

However, as corpus linguistics continues to show in its *descriptive* revelations of the reality of language, what is often presented as language how it *should* be, can sometimes differ significantly from language as it actually *is*, meaning that students are given one thing to study in class and are exposed to another outside

of it. Teachers may or may not be surprised to realise that what they teach is not always what they themselves really do with the language, for example, how they speak at home and with their friends, and how they write their own emails.

It would therefore make more sense to balance didactic staples with alternative real-life examples of common usage, and inform students accordingly about contextual differences or variations of register (formal/informal etc). When guiding students to make the right choices about what kind of language to use, teachers should remember that to say that linguistic deviance is restricted to poetic language as described in Russian Formalism (Jakobson, 1921) is, in Donnerstag's (1996) terms, "an insufficient observation of ordinary language" (p. 145), the constantly and omnipresent creative use of which largely seems to go unnoticed.

Once this is understood, at the teacher's end before the student's, a less reverent, more relaxed view of literature comes into focus, allowing for literature with a small 'l' (McRae, 1994), which does not rely on Shakespeare, Austen, Keats, Pope, Woolf, Joyce or any other writers of canonical stature. Such an open and tolerant understanding of literature sees the creativity in political slogans, commercial rhetoric and adverts, newspaper editorials, online fan fiction, shop signs, menus, and any form of clever wordplay, wherever it may be printed or recorded.

A more fitting way of distinguishing between language creativity and the lack of it can be found in McRae's (1996) description of language functions as either *referential* or *representational*. While the former is simply the use of language for the clear expression of meaning, the latter is the more creative use of language where words are dynamic and can take on different shades of meaning in what McRae (1996) terms *free play*. Learning how to understand and produce both is important for the holistic language development of the learner in improving *communicative competence* on the one hand and *creative competence* on the other.

As such, literature merits the label of *literature* not because of some inherent quality that makes it literary, but rather because of how it is approached and read. If seen as the inventive use of everyday language and as an expression of creative competence studied "in the light of common linguistic usage,...reading literature in the foreign language classroom will retain the close ties...which have largely been severed in academic studies" (Donnerstag, 1996, p. 148). According to McRae (1996), "The language/literature interface is probably the richest vein of learning potential for learners at all levels of language" (p. 23).

It should be the teacher's job to stop students from viewing literary texts as museum artefacts with no linguistic and personal import, and to instead help them "recognis[e a given text's] continuities with ordinary language use or with the choices they themselves can produce" (Carter, 1996, p. 15). They must be made to see that the texts they are presented with do have relevance, and activities should be designed to invite them to respond to words and their meanings, to manipulate

them and experiment with them, in both their referential and representational functions. In this way, learners feel more encouraged to accept the fact that the text they are presented with is laid out for their review, commentary, evaluation and even recreation. This can lead them to the important realisation that, in the real English-speaking (and -writing) world, literary language is just as much a part of everyday language as the other systems- and skills-based communicative language they are learning, and that language is a spectrum with varying degrees of creativity and literariness, whether they are on the receiving end as readers or listeners, or on the productive end as writers or speakers.

LESSON PLANNING

During the workshop, participants were taken through the rationale of planning a literature-based lesson and shown sample questions based on a full short chapter from the chosen literary text, *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech (1994). The apparatus is based on the same kind of "structured approach to literary texts" (p. 1), widely applicable to a range of potential texts, which is used by Dawson and Vassallo (n.d.), and which in turn follows McRae's (1991) stylistic checklist. The idea is to design a variety of questions that require a combination of lower- and higher-order thinking skills focusing on both the referential and representational aspects of the language and helping students move from *what* to *how* the text means.

Step 1: Text selection

The first and obvious step is to select a suitable text (generally a prose passage or a longer poem) to use with one's class, keeping in mind such criteria as the text's target age and the age of the students in question; the thematic content and its appropriateness (attention should be paid to any reference to sensitive issues, e.g. religious, controversial etc.); the expected appeal of the characters, setting and time period to students given how these compare to students' own host environment; the length of the text and the intended duration of the whole exercise (whether or not to extend it beyond one lesson); and the curricular relevance of the lesson to the course, i.e. how the text can fit in with the long-term syllabus, a short-term timetable or students' specific needs as they emerge throughout the course, as the case may be, either topically or linguistically.

Step 2: Stylistic analysis

Once a text has been chosen, it is important to analyse its linguistic potential, using the handy stylistic checklist set out by McRae (1991), as follows:

- **Lexis** – vocabulary
- **Syntax** – strings of words and phrases
- **Cohesion** – structural support of the text, how it is kept together
- **Phonology** – the sound of the text

- **Graphology** – the appearance of text (layout, word and sentence length)
- **Semantics** – meaning
- **Dialect** – chosen language variety (standard/dialectal)
- **Register** – in/formal, pertaining to a specific area/profession/setting
- **Period** – temporally, reflected in genre
- **Function** – intended impact on reader, author-reader relationship, message

As quite an exhaustive list of all the possible linguistic features that may be present in a text, the checklist should be used as a handy reference for teachers who would then need to be selective in narrowing down the scope of the language focus based on the text's most significant or otherwise interesting linguistic items. It would, of course, be impractical to comment on every point listed, if there would even be something to say about each of them in a single text to begin with, that is. Additionally, it would be impossible and irrelevant to over-saturate the lesson with reference to too many language points, as this can risk losing students' interest. The important thing is for the teacher to choose the language that can best challenge students to see how meaning is expressed.

Step 3: Structure questions that grade the task

The third step is to start grading questions according to what a student is expected to know in relation to the text's language or theme before reading, and what s/he should be made to notice upon the first and subsequent readings. Below is a table which briefly illustrates the purpose of each set of questions through a series of pre-, first, second and post-reading questions or exercises.

Pre-Reading Questions	To prepare students for the text by introducing theme or some aspect of it (scene, character type, period etc.)	*lower-order thinking*
First Reading Questions	To facilitate first encounter with the text via specific entry points	
Second Reading Questions	To explore the text's ways of meaning (how it means what it means)	
Post-Reading Questions	To take the reading experience and maximize the text's linguistic, cultural and imaginative potential, as relevant to the learner	*higher-order thinking*

Before reading the text, students can be led to the theme through an attention-grabbing **pre-reading** activity that does not need to be text-based but can, for example, be visual or auditory, much in the same way any topic-based lesson is introduced creatively. A **first reading** would then highlight features students

are expected to understand, which act as *entry points* or *ways into* the text that can help them latch on to basic meaning at the surface and get their bearings, especially as this is done individually (Carter, 1996).

The **second reading** is where the focus shifts to the literary aspects of the text and is meant to take students further than gist or surface detail. Multiple readings set apart by separate sections of graded questions draw students' attention to different linguistic features and their particular literary effects on meaning, taking students from superficial comprehension of the straightforward referential language, to a higher-order, deeper understanding of how representational language, in its greater versatility and/or obscurity, works to mean what it means, and what emotive effects or other significance it has on the text and the reading experience.

Like this, teachers and learners work together as linguists to "make explicit" the reading process, and "make articulate what a native speaker tacitly knows about a text he understands", which is not always so obvious to students and is therefore a particularly beneficial exercise for them, as the path to comprehension is uncovered and students can start to make connections between words or phrases and their underlying meanings, and draw semantic conclusions from things as diverse or not initially apparent as the phonology of certain sentences (for example, how the text sounds when read aloud), or even the graphological presentation of the text (very long or very short sentences, use of punctuation etc.). This nurtures the language awareness of the learner and, even more empowering, brings them as analytical readers closer to the writer once they start to explore and reflect on the effect of the writer's stylistic choices – why such and such a word was chosen instead of its more common counterpart, for example (Simpson, 2004, p. 154).

This kind of linguistic/stylistic analysis has obvious pedagogical advantages for learners, who are still in the process of acquiring the language and are therefore more conscious users of it, very aware of the choices they and others make in day-to-day language use. This can be vouched for by many teachers who have been interrupted mid-sentence time and again by overenthusiastic students to repeat what they had said half a minute before, and to explain why they said it that way instead of another more familiar way. Undoubtedly, this kind of exercise puts learners in a position to do just that and gives them more confidence in their own reading and interpreting abilities.

The challenge rises to creative heights when students are finally cast in the role of active language producers in the last stages of the exercise as part of the **post-reading** tasks. At this point, they are given the opportunity to either extend the text (e.g. *In not more than 20 words write: what you think will happen next* OR *how the story ends* OR *what will happen 10 years later*); or to amend the text in some way (e.g. *Rewrite the dialogue between the two characters in reported speech* OR *In pairs, draft the formal rules listed in the second paragraph into an informal script between teacher and student, and record yourselves acting it out in not more than two minutes*). As Johnson states (as cited in Carter, 1986), "the starting

point for a production exercise is pieces of discourse which the student is asked to do operations on" (p. 115). This pushes learners to exercise their own skills and stretch their existing language to produce something new, with themselves as the writers or speakers depending on the task. This final step is crucial as it "may be the moment when students realise how they actively *construct* meaning" (Donnerstag, 1996, p. 159).

It can also provide the "ideal opportunity to explore further 'readings' [as the case with the given text may be,] such as: cultural, socio-cultural, political, post-colonial, feminist" (Dawson & Vassallo, n.d., p. 3) etc., and could task students with researching an issue in the text (e.g. social class structure in Victorian England, modern-day gender discrimination in the Western world) and giving short class presentations, or interviewing each other or each pair/group about a different mini 'research question'.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

One more considerable advantage to mention is that intensive but regular classroom reading of this kind can stimulate interest in independent reading, and motivate students to read more outside the class. Once they are confident in their own ability to engage with any text and can trust their sensitivity to language, they will be less daunted by the possibility of different nuances of meaning and more keen to explore a text on their own, even if they do not understand everything. This is a strong argument for learner empowerment and autonomy.

Evidently, the well-planned introduction of literature into the ELT classroom has much to offer learners in the way of linguistic, cultural and imaginative engagement, which will allow them to notice and understand the creative language that surrounds them, and enable them to actively produce their own.

As "A branch of modern linguistics devoted to the detailed analysis of literary style, or of the linguistic choices made by speakers and writers in non-literary contexts" (Baldick, 2008, p. 321), stylistics is the best tool to help students move away from their position as observers of the language to that of more hands-on producers of it. For what it can tell us about language, it is a study in the choice of language use. This is why literature, through the intervention of pedagogical stylistics as employed by the informed teacher, can be so useful in the teacher-guided yet learner-driven language learning experience. Literature is a treasure trove of creative language. Used well, pedagogical stylistics is the key.

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Making your toenails twinkle: using learner poems in the English language classroom

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This paper shares some accessible poems I have used with my learners and which in turn have inspired them to experiment with grammatical, lexical and phonological features of English and to create 'learner poetry' of their own as part of their acquisition process. Such encounters with poetry and the creative moments they can inspire not only *extend* learning and make it memorable but can also *transcend* language and may even 'make your toenails twinkle'. In the paper I argue that such opportunities for productive creativity in the classroom should be an integral part of the foreign language syllabus and suggest three conditions for making such activities effective: appropriate scaffolding; an explicit link to syllabus language items; and the engagement of 'the whole person'.

A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

Following is a demonstration of a lesson based around a (slightly-edited) published poem, 'Warning' by Jenny Joseph. The lesson was aimed at A2+/B1 levels and is inspired by an article by Hadfield and Hadfield (2012). Here is a short extract from the poem:

> When I am an old woman I will wear purple
> With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
> And I will spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
> And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
> I will sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
> And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
> And run my stick along the public railings
> And make up for the sobriety of my youth.

A. Before learners engage with the poem, the teacher uses a problem-solving approach to elicit the sentence *When I'm old I will wear purple* and a grammatical pattern is identified (the use of present forms after conjunctions of future time such as *when, until, as soon as,* etc.).

B. Challenging lexis is clarified e.g. *satin sandals, gobble up, samples, railings, sobriety*.

C. A listening task is given in which participants are encouraged to decide on a title for the poem, which is read out (or a recording is played). In class, this might be followed by further exploration of the ideas developed in the poem.

D. Attention is then focused on the position of adverbs of possibility (e.g. *probably, definitely*) with modal auxiliaries such as *will, might* and their negatives.

E. Learners are then invited to write their own mini-poems based on the poem they have read and explored. They are encouraged to be serious or humorous, profound or otherwise: the choice is theirs. They work individually or in pairs, the teacher is used as a consultant (mainly for lexis), peer editing takes place and final drafts written up. Examples of authentic learner creations include:
When I'm old I won't be quiet and I'll bother my neighbours.
I might have a toy boy.
When we are old we will definitely do many crazy and dangerous things.
We will wear full make-up from morning and we will spend our money for a face-lift.
When I'm old I'll be an honourable person.
I'll live in America and I'll speak the good English.
I'll teach my children to honour their old country and their new country.
(Asian teenage learner)

F. After these 'mini-poems' are shared with classmates, the class comment on and ask questions about the content. The class and the teacher then review any language that is inaccurate and/or the teacher can extend language items e.g. *spend money/time on...*; *bother/annoy/get on their nerves*; *toy boy / sugar daddy.*

MOVING IN LOCKSTEP? OR PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTING AND CREATING?

Underpinning the activities demonstrated above are some concepts that we will now explore. In our brains, all data is freely associated. Neurons transmit information by sending chemical and electrical signals. The link through which neurons send these signals are synapses. Every time we make a connection, a mental association, we are strengthening or creating a synapse. This is how we learn. This is how memories are formed.

As teachers trying to promote learning, one of our objectives is to help learners make as many connections, as many associations, as they can. However, what we actually do in practice is often rather limited. Most of us follow a syllabus and most of the time we move through it more or less systematically. For most of us, the syllabus is the course book. As we move through the units progressively the class moves with us, in lockstep mode, through the sequence of teaching units. However, in reality the class is often only moving in lockstep at one level. At another level, different learners are at different stages of acquiring what the teacher is attempting to teach.

One important reason for this is that of course different learners learn at different speeds. Learning a language is learning a skill, and each learner has their own emergent language, or interlanguage, a mixture of L1, L2 and other features. Shelton-Strong (2012) suggests that

> Emergent language might be consistent with what is termed 'learner inter-language', or, in other words, evidence of current understanding of how the language being learnt operates, the learner's current ability to perform in this language, and where this understanding and ability may be headed.

It develops and emerges not at the speed we move through the official syllabus but according to opportunities learners are given to notice (to really attend to) and to experiment with aspects of the language. In other words, we need to make space for learners' personal syllabi, their own 'second syllabus', to emerge and develop.

How do we do this? Well, one important way is to give them opportunities to be creative, to experiment. By being creative, they begin to make meaningful connections, far more connections than they might make by relying exclusively

on the standard course book syllabus. As the influential innovator Steve Jobs (as cited in Wolf, 1996) noted, "Creativity is just connecting things."

A PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM: SLP

However, asking learners to be creative in the classroom is often a daunting task. In Vygotsky's (1978) terminology, it is usually far beyond learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD), that is to say:

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86).

Therefore in order for learner creativity to be both achievable (i.e. brought within their ZPD) and effective (in terms of it being meaningful and even noteworthy), it is proposed that three key conditions need to be in place:

S for scaffolding – The creative activity needs to be appropriately scaffolded, at least initially. The concept of scaffolding is often associated with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD (although Vygotsky never used the term in his writing) and the first definition, offered by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), describes it as the support necessary for "those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity" (p. 90).

To illustrate the role of scaffolding, many teachers will be aware of the difference between asking learners to produce a coherent and cohesive piece of writing without guidance and asking them to produce such an outcome after careful scaffolding. Such scaffolding might include, for example: the breaking up of the task into manageable parts, each of them simple enough, e.g. the writing of topic sentences and the use of specific cohesive devices; the provision of a template; help with the lexical load; and collaborative work (often with learners of a higher level). As with the scaffolding around a building, classroom scaffolding is eventually withdrawn as learners become more independent, or, in the case of creative writing, when it is time for the higher level helpers (including the teacher) to withdraw.

L for linking – The creative task needs to be explicitly linked to a specific area of language. This might at first seem a controversial point and the advocates of task-based learning or a Dogme approach, for example, where teachers work on emergent language rather than pre-defining what is to be learnt, may initially take issue with this feature and we shall return to this presently. However, many experienced teachers will be familiar with a scenario where, if we ask learners to write a poem, or mime a story, or write a song, or draw a picture, it can seem to some rather insubstantial: a bit 'airy-fairy', a tad 'touchy-feely'. Some learners may

think: "What has this got to do with learning a language?" As a result, motivation may suffer. So linking it to a _specific language point_ gives the activity more credibility in the minds of our more sceptical learners.

Of course, it is highly likely that as they create with language, a lot of implicit learning will occur. Lots of _secret_ connections will be made. Language will emerge. Here, then, is an opportunity for task-based learning teachers and Dogme practitioners to make the link(s): if there is an official grammatical/lexical/phonological syllabus, they can explore ways of relating the language which learners produce to the language items in the syllabus (e.g. through recasting and reformulating, contrasting and comparing, or exploring errors); if there is no official syllabus, then it is incumbent on the teacher anyway to work with the language produced and to explore alternatives, highlight patterns (grammatical, syntactical, collocational, phonological, etc.), improve imprecision and to extend language knowledge and use.

This concern with the need to focus on language is one that is sometimes forgotten in the enthusiasm of creativity. It is indeed immensely satisfying when a creative task leads to a considerable amount of language being generated. Also, it has already been argued that often _implicit_ connections are made. Yet we are language teachers first and foremost and an important part of our work surely should be not only to devise tasks which generate language but also to _explicitly_ highlight, upgrade and refine the language our learners have at their disposal.

However, there is (as always) an exception: there are occasions when learners produce creative work the significance of which transcends 'language development' objectives. Such significances may be personal ones, or highly creative, or emotional, or all of these. At this point, a focus on language may be pedantic and therefore inappropriate. We shall see such examples presently.

P for the person – The whole person needs to be engaged in the act of creativity. The concept of engaging the whole person and relating lesson content to learners' lives is a well-established one and has been a staple of Communicative Language Teaching since the early 1960s, at least since Charles Curran's Community Language Learning (CLL) method was first developed. CLL derives its main insights and is largely modelled on Rogerian counselling (Rogers, 1951). Humanistic techniques, the larger set of foreign language teaching practices to which CLL belongs,

> blend what the student thinks, feels and knows with what he is learning in the target language. Rather than self-denial being the acceptable way of life, self-actualization and self-esteem are the ideals the exercises pursue. [The techniques] help build rapport, cohesiveness and caring that far transcend what is already there...help students to be themselves, and be proud of themselves...help foster a climate of caring and sharing in the foreign language class. (Moskowitz, 1978, p. 2)

In short, humanistic techniques engage the whole person, including their emotions and feelings (the affective realm) as well as cognitive skills and social skills.

In our interpretation of engaging the whole person we include:

- The mind – engaging the learner's cognitive skills, including attending, noticing, remembering, processing, analysing, judging and evaluating, problem-solving, making decisions;
- The emotions – engaging the learner's affective domain, e.g. being moved, laughter, excitement, sadness, happiness;
- Personal experience – relating content and language to the learners' lives, worlds, experiences, preferences, opinions, and ideas.

All three of these can be engaged in the act of language creativity. Indeed, by adopting a humanistic approach we can take Descartes' maxim *cogito ergo sum* (*I think therefore I am*) and extend the notion of existence beyond the cognitive: *I feel therefore I am; I experience therefore I am* and add *I create therefore I am*.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Adhering to the principle of linking the act of creativity to the official (grammatical, in this case) syllabus, we can take the grammatical item *present perfect simple for general experience* as a typical example which many teachers will be familiar with. We will now look at some ways in which tasks can be devised to help learners use their cognitive processing skills and to involve their emotions and their personal worlds and experiences as they create learner poetry whilst at the same time engaging with this structure and other areas of the official syllabus.

Processing and the personal

The following task engages learners cognitively (their mental processing skills) and includes information about celebrity personalities they are likely to have come across (at least in the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere): the singers Amy Winehouse and Adele. It asks them to process the information by distinguishing between the meanings/uses of the Present Perfect Simple and the Past Simple in relation to a relationship between past and present time.

Adele and Amy

A.   Amy Winehouse was born in London in 1983 and died in 2011. Adele was born in London in 1988.
Who does each of the following sentences refer to? Write Amy or Adele next to each.

1. She has lived most of her life in London.
2. She lived most of her life in London.
3. She wrote many songs.
4. She has written many songs.
5. She has won several Grammy awards.
6. She won several Grammy awards.
7. She wrote most of her own songs.
8. She has written most of her own songs.

B.   Fill in the missing verbs.

1.   Sir Bobby Charlton _____many times for Manchester United.
2.   Lionel Messi _____ many times for Barcelona.
3.   Shakespeare _____ many famous plays.
4.   Dan Brown _____ some best-selling novels.

C.   Write some examples about people from your own country.

1.   Yuri Gagarin/Vladimir Putin/Lenin
2.   Dante/Roberto Benigni/Silvio Berlusconi
3.   Goethe/Angela Merkel/Franz Beckenbauer
4.   Rafael Nadal/Pedro Almodovar/Picasso
5.   Tom Cruise/Usain Bolt/Pele/Abba/The Beatles/One Direction

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Rhyme and rapping...and creative originality

In this activity (based on an idea first introduced to me by Jo Gakonga, 2012), learners are introduced to the following jazz chant:

I haven't been to India
I haven't eaten frog's legs
I've always lived in Malta
I've always lived at home

I haven't been to France
And I haven't learnt to dance.
I haven't been abroad
And I'm getting rather bored.

Learners are invited to listen to the chant, to identify stress and to beat out the rhythm on their hands or desks. Finally, they read out the whole chant with

gusto, with different parts of the class taking responsibility for a different part of the poem/chant. They are then encouraged to use the chant as a template and to write their own similar jazz chant or rap. As well as the provision of a template, the activity is scaffolded firstly by the exploration of rhyming words that rhyme with learners' own and other cities or countries e.g. *Rome: home, alone; Spain: plane, again rain; the States: wait, fate, mates; Italy: jittery*. The second scaffolding task makes a link with a language item: the teacher guides the learners to discover that with auxiliary verbs, the negative is normally stressed whereas the affirmative isn't, e.g.

I've <u>been</u> to <u>Spain</u>   *I <u>haven't</u> been to <u>Spain</u>*

So learners write their own poems, edit (including peer editing) and then rehearse and finally chant them. Later, work is done on language that has emerged, including error analysis and extension work. As mentioned earlier however, such post-task focus on form and lexis may not always be appropriate, as is the case in the following 'poem' written by one of Gakonga's (2012) learners, an Iraqi woman, 'Samira', in her early thirties. She had fled the wars in Iraq and was living in Germany. Samira's class were asked to complete their rap/chant/poem at home, using any resources available to them. Samira abandoned the rhythm of the original template and went her own way.

Samira's poem

I've never been to Ireland. But I've been in love with Irish man. He had a huge talent to gain women's favour, but he was so mean. He inculcated in me a taste for art and love for adventure. Our love story was bright and unforgettable, but it finished with a phrase "I'm sorry". At parting he gave me...
...a kiss with an fragrant of Irish legend.
I've never been to Italy. But I've been in love with Italian. He's been very clever, he's known many languages, but he's been so nervous and so fault-finding person. Well, we let as part friends. He gave me in memory (or gave me as keepsake?) the 33 recipes for Italian pasta and
...one recipe for happiness.
I've never been to Spain.
But I've been head-over-heels in love with Spaniard. He's been extremely generous and kind. I thought that fortuna smiled on me, but he'd been in my city just for few weeks. He left for me a lot of presents and
... phone number which never answer.
I've never been to Portugal...
I've never been to Norway...
I've never been to France...
But once I met <u>him</u> and he taught me to love a life and be grateful. He gave me self-confidence and opened at me a woman.
Now I think: "There is a really journey – to be in love.
Not important where you are, most important...
...with who you are."

Samira's teacher felt that what Samira had produced transcended the objectives of the foreign language classroom and felt that for this particular piece of learner output at this particular point in time the only appropriate feedback was to convey congratulations for the amount of work dedicated and for the impression made on readers by the images, wit and insights contained within the poem.

Perfect senses

In this final example of integrating SLP features in the creation of learner poetry, learners are first invited to think of a memorable personal experience they have undergone. They are scaffolded by a series of prompts and they are then encouraged to recount the experience with others. Powerful emotions are often released by this activity.

Learners are then engaged with the following poem, which was introduced to me by Scott Thornbury and appeared in the course book *Highlight* (Vince, 1992).

The poet's name is a pseudonym.

Learners first listen to the poem for any of the five senses that are evoked and also to recall any of the images.

I Have

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

Rhys Burton

The class are then presented with the following sentence stems and invited to write their own:

I have... poem.
I have seen...   I have heard...   I have touched...   I have smelled...
I have tasted...   I have done...   I have remembered...

After drafting, consultation and editing they share their poems with their colleagues. Here are two examples of learner poems produced in this activity. Tere is a Brazilian teacher and Tommaso is a young Italian lawyer who is politically engaged amongst socially vulnerable groups.

Tere's poem

I have seen love in his eyes

I have touched his soul gently

I have tasted the sweetness of his kiss

I have remembered the reasons why I married him

I have heard his comforting voice

I have smelled fear when we are apart

I have done everything I can for this love

Tommaso's poem

I've seen people telling the truth.

I've touched the truth itself.

I've tasted the flavour of honesty.

I've remembered how it made me feel.

I've heard other people telling lies.

I've smelled the stink of a lie.

I've done what was best for all.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude then, we note that, first of all, creativity in the language classroom helps learners make and strengthen connections in their brains. It creates spaces in which learners' personal syllabi can develop and it makes learning memorable by involving the mind, the emotions and the personal worlds of our learners, sometimes in ways that transcend the learning objectives of the foreign language classroom. It is also proposed, however, that creativity needs to occur within an SLP framework: it should be carefully scaffolded, linked to syllabus content and involve personalisation. It is, therefore, not an optional add-on but an essential component in consolidating and extending learning.

The writing of learner poetry is particularly suited to the above objectives as, in the words of Dylan Thomas (1952):

Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, makes your toenails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing, makes you know that you are alone and not alone in the unknown world, that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your own...

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English through art:
an ELT enrichment

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Most ELT practitioners know what attracts students and why one course book is more popular than another. Undoubtedly, much of it depends on the layout and the colourful pictures. If images are so motivating then why not go a step further and use famous paintings to engage students? By using the universal language of visual art to bridge language barriers we are also enriching students by exposing them to a variety of world cultures and experiences. Paintings from all over the world can be used in the adult classroom as well as with young learners. In this paper we will explore how paintings can be used as 'launch pads' to practise and develop various language skills and sub-skills. Your 'tourist' days in an art gallery are over: never again will you look at a painting and not think of how you can adapt it for use in the classroom. In this paper I try to demonstrate that creativity in the language classroom is not limited to the gifted and talented but is something that any teacher can try to apply (Maley & Peachey, 2015).

WHY ART?

Most teachers have at some stage of their teaching career successfully used songs in the classroom. Art, on the other hand, is under-exploited and yet if we think about it, art is everywhere. Art and design are everywhere – in the clothes we wear, in the cars we drive, in the way we arrange food on our plates, and in the way we furnish our homes. Yet few of us make much use of art in our language classrooms.

When choosing a colour or a piece of clothing we are reacting to what we see and making aesthetic judgements about it. So we are all visually literate to an acute degree and highly discriminating in our tastes. Art also provides teachers with an opportunity to create lessons that will live long in their students' memories (Grundy, Bociek, & Parker, 2011, pp. 7-12).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND LANGUAGE

The essential point is that art stimulates description or provokes comments. This language can then be focused on in the classroom. In our case it is not so much Oscar Wilde's 'art for art's sake' but art as a means to an end. The aim of this practical paper is to provide art-based activities that stimulate language learning, although, of course, alerting students to art appreciation is a desirable by-product (Grundy, Bociek, & Parker, 2011, pp. 7-12).

REASONS FOR USING ART IN THE CLASSROOM

As shown by Keddie (2010) and Lightfoot (2008), there are several reasons for using art in the classroom. To begin with *art uplifts us aesthetically,* enhancing the learning environment. A home without pictures, posters or paintings is a bare, unwelcoming place. Remembering Krashen's (1985) seminal work on the affective filter, we should try to create an environment conducive to learning. After all, as Wilhelm Von Humboldt famously said, "You cannot teach a language; you can only create the conditions under which it might be learned." Instead of irregular past tense posters why not occasionally brighten up the classroom with posters of paintings? Convert your classroom into an art gallery. Art is such *an accessible resource* when you consider all the old calendars we accumulate over the years and postcards we buy from museums and art galleries in a fit of enthusiasm when abroad. Surprise your students one day and replace all the 'boring' stuff with colourful posters. Not only are you offering them *variety* but this same variety can also act as *a springboard to learning*. It will arouse the students' curiosity and take them on journeys hitherto unknown. Above all art is *communication*. We are not necessarily interested in the artist's message, if ever s/he had one. Once the painting is out there, it no longer belongs to the artist. It is our own response to it that can be shared in the communicative language classroom. There are tens of paintings that will undoubtedly *spark the imagination* and unlock creative thought (Keddie, 2010; Lightfoot, 2008).

USING ART IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

1. Controversial art quotes
To begin with you can look up some controversial art quotes on the Internet. Below, I have given some examples:

- *Spending public money on art is a waste.*
- *Art is something which generates an emotional reaction.*
- *Should art need to be 'explained'?*
- *Graffiti isn't art; it's vandalism.*
- *It's shocking how much some fashionable artists earn.*
- *A picture is worth a thousand words.*

Rationale: Students are slowly drawn into discussing art, warming up to the subject as it were. They can be taught, before or after, the language of opinion, the language of negotiation, and the language of presentation.

Learning outcomes: By the end of the activity students should feel more comfortable talking about abstract subjects, using functional language.

Procedure: Students are given a quote on a card and asked to discuss it in pairs. After about five minutes, and assuming there are 12 students in class, students are then regrouped into two groups of six, each group having six different quotes to report on. The teacher monitors and notes down language for error analysis.

2. What makes a work of art?
Another possibility of introducing art in the classroom in a general way while producing language is by asking the question: '*What makes a work of art?*'

Rationale: Students of a higher level become more familiar with developing arguments, using the language of opinion and persuasion.

Learning outcomes: By the end of the activity students should have become more familiar with discussing art, and able to present and defend an opinion.

Procedure: Show students Duchamp's *Fountain* (http://goo.gl/BROk6w) and observe their reaction, and then ask 'Is this a work of art?' There is no right or wrong answer for this since the answer is invariably subjective. You can, however, guide students by asking a couple of more questions. Students are individually asked to make a list of their criteria for what art is by considering these questions:

- What should an artwork provide to both the maker and the viewer?
- Who is it for?
- Where does one encounter art?
- What is the role of the artist?

In pairs or groups the students then have to discuss what criteria they have in common and which they disagree about (MoMALearning, n.d.). The teacher should monitor and pick up language for error analysis.

3. Pieter Brueghel's *Children's Games* (1560)

Over 400 years ago, Brueghel painted more than 80 games in this painting (http://goo.gl/hU2iq2).

Rationale: Familiarising students with art, arousing their curiosity by getting them to check their predictions, and getting students to talk about themselves and their childhood.

Learning outcomes: By the end of the activity, students would probably have used or attempted to use 'used to' vs. 'would' in clear and appropriate contexts.

Procedure: Ask students to brainstorm, in pairs or groups, as many children's games of the past as they can remember. (No computer games allowed if you have teenage students). Show the painting on an IWB or give out laminated copies of the picture. Students check if their predictions are correct. Brueghel's games include leap frog, blind man's bluff, playing with dolls, swings, playing shop, hand stand, soap bubbles, hide and seek, hoop rolling, wedding games, bowling, climbing trees, etc. Students are then asked to talk to their partner about their favourite childhood game. The teacher monitors and looks out for the use of 'used to' and 'would'. This structure could be presented before or after in the TTT mode.

4. Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller's *After School* (1841)

This painting shows a group of pupils, boys and girls outside a school (http://goo.gl/afN2lf).

Rationale: Again students are introduced to an artwork that could be an end in itself. By describing the picture and comparing it to a similar scene from nowadays they would naturally be producing and using the present continuous and present simple tenses.

Learning outcomes: Besides the grammar, students would have used lexis to describe clothes, looks and actions. This activity can be also be used for lower levels.

Procedure: Students are asked if they are familiar with the painting, if they like it, etc. They are then told to look carefully and in twos, threes or groups (depending on the logistics of the classroom) discuss in what way these children of 150 years ago are different from children of today: e.g. no shoes, girls wearing head scarves, no branded school bags, no uniforms, the boys are wearing hats and knickerbockers, etc... The teacher watches out for language, checking if students are using the present continuous to describe the picture and the present simple to talk about pupils nowadays. Depending on the teacher's style of teaching, she could first model: *The boys in the picture <u>are not wearing</u> any shoes. Today all schoolchildren <u>wear</u> shoes.* Alternately, she could adopt a test/teach/test mode. Through discrete monitoring, the teacher finds out what they produce and then builds on it. Finally, working on their own, students are asked to jot down the advantages and disadvantages of wearing a school uniform. Students are grouped according to who has more pros or more cons. Some more minutes are given for the new groups to compare their 'arguments'. Finally, a debate is set up, with a chairperson, a minute-taker, etc.

5. Claude Monet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1865–1866)

Rationale: Students are encouraged to go beyond the painting and personalize what it represents. They are also expected to have fun using English to discuss ideas and persuade each other.

Learning Outcomes: Students are encouraged to activate passive vocabulary, to use 'would' for a hypothetical situation and to develop arguments.

Procedure: Students are shown the painting (http://goo.gl/XTaVgR) and asked if they like picnics. In pairs they talk about a memorable picnic they've been on. Alone they are then asked to list six items they would take with them. Would they take wine? Would they take music? Would they take board games? They compare in pairs and then negotiate a common list of eight items. This could develop into a pyramid discussion that will finally end with the class having just one list. Inform students that the original painting had been stored for a long time in a damp cellar and as it was mouldy round the edges several people in the picture had to be cut off. There were originally 12 people in it. On their own students think of three people they would like to invite to their picnic and why. In groups they then discuss their choices and the reasons for making them.

6. Pierre Auguste Renoir's *City Dance, Country Dance* (1883)

Rationale: Instead of using the usual boring pictures from a course book for a

'Spot the Difference' activity, I picked Renoir's paintings (http://goo.gl/F9JcKH) to expose students to art and therefore to authentic pictures.

Learning Outcomes: Students would have to observe carefully and look out for details using the language of description, 'there is/there are', and the present continuous.

Procedure: Very quickly and from a distance, show students the two paintings. Tell them they are similar but not the same. Ask if anyone knows who the artist is. Put students in pairs. Give out laminated, colour copies of A to one student and B to the other. Students face each other and keep their picture to themselves, i.e. they are not to show the pictures to each other. They describe their picture and ask questions in order to find eight differences. Once the differences are found, students can look at each other's pictures to check. Finally, the teacher can focus on some language, correct or incorrect, that she overhears during the monitoring.

7. James Tissot's *Bad News* (*The Parting*) (1872)

Rationale: Students are encouraged to be imaginative by looking at a painting that has two or three figures. This activity encourages students to go beyond the picture and be creative with language.

Learning outcomes: Students should realize the difference between saying what comes to mind and using more tentative, diplomatic language to communicate with others. They should also be using some ways of expressing the future when expressing what's going to happen next.

Procedure: I chose James Tissot's *Bad News* (http://goo.gl/IxGpxs) as the faces are very expressive. The teacher shows students a copy of the painting, puts them in groups of three, and allocates a different character to each student. Student A is the woman in white, Student B is the woman in black, and Student C is the man. Together they have to work out the relationship between the three people and what they do for a living. Alone each student then writes about what their character is thinking and what s/he actually says. They rehearse it in their group and the teacher asks for volunteers to play-act it. Finally, they discuss in their group what's going to happen next. This activity could be light-hearted, funny or serious as long as it fits the character's pose or expression. Error analysis may, as usual, be focused on at the end.

8. Why are you smiling Mona Lisa?

Rationale: Since all students are familiar with the *Mona Lisa* (http://goo.gl/

Hcolu4), they are here building on the familiar but experimenting with the less familiar language.

Learning outcomes: Students should produce modals of probability and possibility during this activity, e.g. *"she might be smiling because… she could be smiling…"* If students get them wrong then the teacher should follow up with a lesson on modal verbs.

Procedure: Students are shown the picture and asked if they have seen it before. They are asked who the artist is and where it can be seen. They are then given a handout with three lines as in:
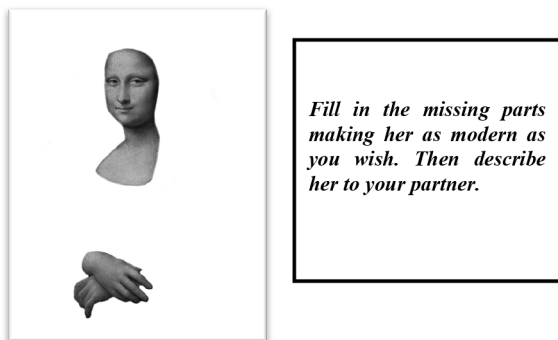
> *Why are you smiling, Mona Lisa? In twos think of three reasons:*
> 1…………………………………………………………………………
> 2…………………………………………………………………………
> 3…………………………………………………………………………

Students then share their ideas and find out if there are any common ones.

The teacher can further exploit the subject by giving students the handout in Figure 1 and asking them to do a picture dictation. The template drawing should be on both sides of the page, one to create themselves, and one side to draw according to instructions given by a partner. Students are first asked to 'finish their drawing' individually. When they do so, they put their chairs back to back and Student A dictates her drawing to Student B who draws information on the unfinished template. Student B can ask clarifying questions. When that is done, Student B then dictates her drawing to Student A.

FIGURE 1: PICTURE DICTATION

Fill in the missing parts making her as modern as you wish. Then describe her to your partner.

(Source: http://www.kleuteridee.nl/kunst/)

Finally, the pair show pictures to each other to see how accurate their reproduction and communication were.

9. Titles and paintings
(adapted from Grundy & Parker, 2011, p. 73)

Rationale: To help students find ways of making a case and arguing for it.

Learning outcomes: Students need to justify their choice of title by using modals of deduction and modals of possibility.

Procedure: Choose five random pictures by famous artists. I chose:

American Gothic by Grant Wood
The Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dalí
The Son of Man by Rene Magritte
Weeping Woman by Pablo Picasso
Woman with a Hat by Henri Matisse

Students are put in groups and given laminated postcard-sized copies of the five paintings. The teacher encourages them to be imaginative and think of possible titles and provide clear justifications for their choice. They are then regrouped in such a way to have a representative from each group forming new groups. Together they compare and give reasons for their choices. Finally, the teacher puts the original titles on the board and students decide who was closest to the real title.

10. If they could talk...what would they say?
(adapted from Cruz Arcos Sorando, 2012)

Rationale: Students are encouraged to use their imagination or use past experiences to talk about possible reminiscences of where the objects have been, what they have seen, who they have met, etc. I chose paintings of a pipe, a hat, a pair of shoes and a chair. You could also use an umbrella, a cigarette, a pen, or some keys. This is an ideal activity to use in the test/teach/test mode to find out how well students are using tenses, and teach/revise later if necessary.

Learning outcomes: Students will need to use all kind of tenses in the active and passive voice.

Procedure: Find paintings of common everyday objects. Put students in groups and give them a different picture per group; in my case, Magritte's pipe, Van

Gogh's chair, a yellow straw hat, and a pair of shoes. Give them time to discuss the objects and think of answers to the questions *where/what/who...?* After 10 minutes, regroup and create groups that will have representatives from all the groups. The new group will now consist of someone who talked about the pipe, someone who talked about the hat, etc. In this way you are taking a back seat and facilitating student-student feedback.

11. Re-ordering text
(adapted from Keddie, 2010)

Rationale: Students are encouraged to learn about the background of a missing painting, thereby increasing their knowledge of art, improving their general knowledge, and practising English.

Learning outcomes: Students discuss together how to re-order a text and scan the text to find the information needed to answer the questions.

Procedure: Show students the *Portrait of Doctor Gachet* (http://goo.gl/4X7MsH) and ask them in twos to answer the following questions:

- Can you identify the artist?
- If yes, what do you know about him?
- When do you think it was painted?
- Who do you think the person in the painting is?
- The painting was in *The Guinness Book of Records* for 14 years. Why?

Put students in groups of five and give out a different slip (A, B, C, D, E) to each member of the group. The group works together to find the right order, and check if their answers to the questions above were anywhere near the truth.

A. But perhaps the painting was no longer his to burn. With a lot of debt, it is possible that Saito had used the Van Gogh as part of a collateral agreement. By the time of his death in 1996, it was not clear if it had been passed to his creditors or his heirs.

B. 12 years later, both ownership and location of the painting remain a mystery. Some believe that it has simply disappeared into the darkness of the international art market. Tokyo, Europe and the USA are all rumoured to be Dr Gachet's current residence. But until the work resurfaces, some may like to imagine that Saito did actually take Van Gogh's physician to his grave.

C. Exactly 100 years later, the painting went on sale at Christie's auction house in New York. The art world was stunned as the work was sold for

over $80 million to a Japanese businessman called Ryoei Saito. This made it the most expensive painting ever sold, a record that it held for 14 years.

D.   The painting was shipped to Japan and stored in a secret location somewhere in Tokyo. A few years later, Saito shocked the art world a second time when he is reported to have told friends that the portrait should be burned at his cremation. He later said that this was a joke.

E.   The year is 1890 and Vincent Van Gogh is spending the last weeks of his life in Auvers-sur-Oise near Paris. He is being treated for depression by a French physician called Paul Gachet who becomes one of the Dutch painter's last subjects. Van Gogh refers to the portrait as "sad but gentle, yet clear and intelligent".

(The right order is E, C, D, A, B.)

Put "he is being treated" on the board and ask students to discuss these questions:

● What tense is it?
● Is it continuous or simple?
● Who is the agent?
● Who is the subject?
● Are the agent and the subject the same person?
● How is the tense formed?

Give students a copy of the ordered text and ask them to underline any more structures in the passive, first on their own and then compare in twos. The lesson can then continue with more activities practising the passive. One possibility is to give students cards with, for example, the words *phone, Alexander Graham Bell, iPhone, Apple*. After matching cards, they have to create sentences:

The phone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell.
The iPhone is made by Apple.

(adapted from http://www.teachitlanguages.co.uk/attachments/23677.pdf)

12. Mary Cassatt's *The Letter* (1890-1891)

Rationale: Students are encouraged to distinguish between different registers when writing letters.

Learning outcomes: By looking at a painting and answering the questions, students become aware of the different writing styles involved in texting, emailing,

and letter writing.

Procedure: Students warm up to the subject by looking at the painting (http://goo.gl/Z3EkKn) and answering some questions:

- What is she doing? Where is she? What country?
- Do you still write letters?
- Do you prefer writing, phoning or texting?

In pairs they then discuss if they write letters, and their favourite means of communication. They are then given a jumbled up version of two letters, one formal and one informal. In pairs they have to separate them. Finally, they are asked to discuss this question in groups: Would you rather text, phone, write...?

- If you had bad news to give
- If you were breaking up with someone
- If you had good news to give
- If you won a good sum of money
- If you received good results

And now imagine *you're* on the receiving end: *how* would you rather be informed?

CONCLUSION

Given art's many uses in the English language classroom, perhaps Oscar Wilde's idea that "All art is quite useless" can be slightly modified to read "All art is [not] quite useless."

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12

Using advertising in ELT

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Using advertising in the ELT classroom allows the teacher to take advantage of short, authentic language materials to help students use English in different, creative ways. With print ads hidden persuaders can be found and at the same time they offer students a chance to create their own new advertisements. Radio spots let students use their voices in new ways, and television advertising allows students to analyze ads for effectiveness, "pitch" ads to their classmates and create their own new versions of their favorite spots. Creativity in this context requires guidelines that should be followed, but still allows the students to think and speak in an unusual or novel manner. Students are enthusiastic because commercials are part of their world. They not only learn more about how advertising works, but find out how it can be manipulative as well.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity in the classroom can be expressed in many different ways. It could be students working on poetry or drama or other forms of creative writing. Other possibilities include making a film or a podcast for creative speaking. Reading great literature is almost always beneficial as students can enjoy the creativity of others, while students seem to be listening and watching English movies and series often in their free time and thus seeing how creativity is put into practice.

Teaching at a vocational college that specializes in advertising means that my students are often admitted on the basis of their creativity. So sometimes my goals as an English teacher have to do with increasing creativity within a set of guidelines. Many of the activities that work for my students can also help high school students in English classes express their own fresh ideas about the subject. However, using advertising should not just be about showing students humorous commercials and asking them how they liked what they saw. Structure can help to identify when, why and how something is creative and thus make it easier for students to try their own hands at coming up with new impulses.

When teaching a lesson that will include advertising, it is good if the teacher can explain to the students the difference between marketing and advertising as these two terms are often confused. Marketing is the umbrella term for all sorts of promotion that will help to sell products a company has produced. Types of promotion could be: public relations, sales, guerilla marketing, point of sale promotion, direct marketing, advertising, etc. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy the perceived needs, wants, and objectives of the customer and the organization (Wells, Moriarty, & Burnett, 2006).

Advertising is a specific way of selling that usually inserts a promotional "piece" into media. It is a non-personal, one-way communication. A TV commercial helps to finance a TV show. Radio commercials help finance the radio programme. Outdoor advertising (posters, billboards, rolling boards, and various other advertising items) either help pay for government transportation or are extra income for the provider of the space. Print advertising helps to finance everything from free subway newspapers to glossy magazines. Advertising is a way to sell a product to many people through some channel of communication. Occasionally it does this without an extra medium, such as when you receive junk mail in your mailbox or spam in your email inbox; this is called direct marketing. The Internet is full of both advertising through a channel of communication in the form of banners and skyscrapers within a website, as well as direct marketing in the form of websites. Advertising is defined as "The placement of announcements and persuasive messages in time or space purchased in any of the mass media by business firms, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services, organizations, or ideas" (AMA, n.d.).

PRINT ADVERTISING ACTIVITIES

One of the easiest activities to do with students is to have them bring in print advertising they have found and talk about how it is effective. To do this it is important to realize that advertising is used to inform, persuade or remind people about a product and its benefits. When persuading people to buy something, there are a number of "hidden persuaders" – a term coined by Vance Packard in the 1950s – that can be found in many ads. They include: sex (you will be more attractive to a partner if you use the product), ambition (you will be better than everyone else), health (if you use the product you will be healthier), testimonials (if a famous actor/actress uses the product you will also become like that actor/actress), helpful to the environment (using the product is good for the environment), independence, social acceptability (people will like you more), work simplification, and family values (your family will like you better). Whether students have brought in their own or you hand out magazines, ask students to look for these hidden persuaders and talk about them. An ad can have more than one. Generally, it is important to also look at the target market – those people who are likely to need the product – in connection with all these exercises. If a product is meant for people who are older or feel ill, then younger students may not be "pulled" by the hidden persuaders. Students, of course, can also produce their own print ad for a product they are interested in – or for a product that does not yet exist. One example might be for students to make a print ad for a new household robot. Let them determine the type of tasks the robot performs. Unfortunately, my students often invent robots that take care of children as their main goal in order to let parents have free time. I try to explain to my students that very often robots are there to take over mundane tasks for parents so they can spend MORE time with their children.

RADIO ADVERTISING ACTIVITIES

Radio advertising can also be created by giving students background information about a topic and then asking them to create a 30- or 60-second spot encouraging people to buy the product or service. In my classes I ask students to make a radio spot that encourages people to eat eggs (there was just such a campaign in America: http://goo.gl/7avLuf) and while I gave them some statistics/research findings, it was their job to come up with how to do the selling. Another possible campaign might be to encourage young people to go to a police school to learn to become police officers. Topics should be unusual so that students do not find examples too easily on the Internet which might lead to copying rather than creativity.

Before this activity takes place, it is important to remind students of how necessary it is to speak clearly and quickly in a radio ad. Although we generally speak at about 125 words a minute, in a radio commercial many people are speaking at almost double that speed. Also, the need to add voice colour is particularly

important as the audience cannot see the speaker. As part of this lesson, I usually start with tongue twisters (some can be found at: http://goo.gl/uTbLoP), which require both speed and clarity. Then I actually have students practise a 30- or 60-second spot with a text that includes sound effects (here are some 30-second ads for just one voice: https://goo.gl/qLMTxY). If there are more people talking in the radio spot, put people in a group and they should assign roles, practise for speed and record the final result on their phones. The phones can then be plugged into the classroom loudspeakers and the whole class can listen to the results. If students do the spots on their own, be sure to assign the same spot to a number of people, make sure they run through the script first to get the timing right, and then have them do the recording. Students usually enjoy the task and love to hear what the other groups/individuals did as well. It is advisable to do this activity over a period of 2/3 lessons. In the first lesson, listen with the class to radio ads (here is one possibility with scripts as well: http://goo.gl/xkShKQ) and discuss how they are effective, how a radio ad is different from a print ad in terms of this effectiveness, etc. They should then try out the sound effects and timing in a radio spot script you give them.

As group work and then homework they should break into three- or four-student teams and come up with an idea and script for their own spot on the topic you have given them. It would be good to give them a lot of information about the topic so they have the vocabulary and details they will need. The whole class should have the same topic with each group getting a chance to approach it differently. In the next lesson you, as the teacher, should check over the spot the groups have written to be sure the work is on target and that the English language is used correctly. Each ad needs to be sure to have an end section that is a call for action which includes some way to contact someone – usually with a website or telephone number – for further information. In this second lesson time can be given for students to revise and rethink their ads.

In the final lesson all radio clips are turned in – usually via a flash drive and uploaded on the classroom computer for you to download on your own flash drive. Everyone listens to the various spots that were made and a discussion can be held about what went well and not so well. As a teacher, you do not need to be concerned with how they do their recordings as today many students have those skills already. Their telephones are usually capable of this as well as being handy to keep track of the timing. Students' spots should be exactly 30 or 60 seconds long and that is part of the assignment's assessment criteria.

ACTIVITIES WITH TV COMMERCIALS

Looking for effectiveness

TV ads are the most entertaining type of advertising to explore in the classroom. As a medium for teaching they have the advantage that they are short and have

authentic language and can be analyzed for effectiveness like all other advertising. The effectiveness of an ad can be addressed by means of the following questions:

- Has the right target group been addressed?
- Are there humour/fun elements? (How is this shown? Two elements of fun can be: exaggeration and juxtaposition).
- Are there other ways used to attract attention? (What are they? Why is the ad memorable?).
- What information/product benefits is/are emphasized?
- Which medium was chosen and what methods or techniques were used?

A commercial series I like to show in class is one for Panda cheese (https://goo.gl/I6Hxar). I show this series without comment and ask students for their reactions. Generally, students like the commercials, and I ask them why they are fun. If they remember our discussion of what makes something funny, they will come up with two points. This commercial has juxtaposition both with calming and aggressive music as well as juxtaposition of a gentle panda with violent movement. Both of these effects create surprise in the audience's mind. In addition, there is exaggeration in both the slow motion of the panda and the extra violent movement at the end – as well as the surprise on the faces of the people involved. These elements all lead to our interpretation of the commercials as funny However, I have had some teachers react negatively to the violence in the series. The possibilities of why this is so and whether it affects the effectiveness of the commercials need to be discussed. There is no English language in the series except subtitles. Once a discussion has taken place it would also be good to inform the students that this series of ads won a competition in Arabic countries (2010) and was made by an Egyptian advertising company. One can then look for the cultural differences in the series when they watch it another time.

The sales pitch

I also often show two ads that are for a similar but competing product. If one is looking for very good ads, the Super Bowl commercials from the USA (http://superbowlcommercials.tv/) can often offer good possibilities. The two I compare are related to headhunting/employment companies (for the company careerbuilders.com and their commercial called 'Monkey Business' see: https://goo.gl/ELVUw4; for the company monster.com and the commercial called 'Office Decoration' see: http://goo.gl/cAGV1S). They were produced for different companies but both companies are involved in finding employment for people. Whatever two commercials you decide on, it might be a good idea to start by discussing what the company wants to do in the commercial – usually to get attention to sell more of its products or services. In the case of headhunting companies, they would probably like to have more qualified people apply with their company so that they

can find them a job and receive a commission for doing so. Therefore, in order to make more money they not only need more people, but more qualified people and probably their USP (unique selling proposition) is to be able to find employment for people better than any other company.

I show both commercials to the class and then I divide the class into two groups. One group is told that they need to "pitch" one of the commercials as a solution to my problem as an employment agency. The other group gets the second commercial. I give them about 30 minutes to talk in the group about why their commercial is good. In real life an advertising agency is expected to come up with an idea for a campaign for a company and then sell that idea in a "pitch" or presentation which explains something about the commercial as well as why it would be the best way to sell the company's product. There are many ways both of these commercials can be sold. Each commercial was considered a successful advertisement and was actually produced. That means that each commercial was paid for and produced so each certainly has many advantages. It is up to each team to come up with the points within the spot that will best sell their product. If you have a big class, you can divide the class into three groups and the third group is the company and makes the final decision about why one of the two commercials wins the "pitch". This group (or you) must give good reasons for their choice of the best team. It would be important for the "pitch" to include how the commercial actually targets the correct market, how the commercial shows the special benefits of the company's product, and what forms within the commercial make it memorable. The group that sells their commercial best wins the competition – just as would happen in real life. This lesson needs about one hour from the time the commercials are shown until the results are then discussed.

Making a parody of a commercial

Another possibility for students to work with commercials in a creative way is to make their own "spoof" of a well known, or lesser known commercial. They take the ad and change it in some way to reflect new ideas. The series I show for this activity is the original 'Mom song with lyrics', which was very popular in the USA a while ago (http://goo.gl/VQ9D9s). Dove made a commercial from this idea (https://goo.gl/Vv7Akp) and then young people did their own parodies. I show all of this to the students and then we come up with something of our own. Even though this can be done with almost any TV spot, students should remember that in the end the spot should be effective in presenting the product and targeting the right market.

Creating the storyboard

Another possibility for students is to take a TV spot they really like and break it down into frames – that is, with the computer they should take screen shots of various parts of the commercial – a minimum of six, maximum eight – and create a

storyboard (a blueprint of what a spot will look like when it is made) that explains what is happening in the ad – both from the audio as well as the visuals. This requires the students to adopt the present simple and present continuous tenses when they describe both the visuals and auditory elements of their commercial, shot by shot. A storyboard is usually made before a commercial is produced to save the costs of producing it while still showing a prospective client what the ad would be like, or later to tell the producers how the ad should be produced. Learn more about how storyboards work here: http://goo.gl/LkE92Y. A possible template for students' storyboards can be found here: http://goo.gl/zsyvAh.

Once they have completed the storyboard and turned it in, a second step is to have them pitch their TV ad. This requires the student to think of why this particular ad best represents the interests of the company in terms of effectiveness: How does it get the attention of the target group? What kind of call to action does it have? This is important because it means that the target group will not only understand the USP of the product but also go out and buy it. This is a different concept from just describing what happens in the commercial (which they did in their storyboard). This is similar to the sales pitch in a group activity mentioned above. However, this is an individual project and it requires the student to understand why the commercial works well and to be able to explain that to others in order for the sales pitch to be persuasive. This should happen after the storyboard has been corrected. As a potential customer (and teacher), I often play a "bad" client who is not happy with all parts of the commercial. Sometimes I ask the students if clothing can be changed, or if a different gender could play the part of one of the characters. I might ask for a change in location. The students must decide (quickly) if I, as the client, can be right; or if they, as expert advertisers, can convince me that their decisions are correct. Sometimes the changes that need to be made may matter, and sometimes they may not. This is all part of learning when to decide to defend your position and when you can adapt your ideas to your client's wishes.

Making a viral ad for the Internet

It is, of course, also possible to make a viral ad for a product that will not be shown on television, as it might not be politically correct or is in some other way not meant for a broad audience. These commercials need to be funny otherwise no one on the internet will share the spot with their friends and the company will not get any free advertising via social media. Here it is important for the students to find the limits of good taste while trying to achieve a spot with a good sense of humor.

CONCLUSION

By using various types of advertising, a teacher can push the students to be creative as well as help them understand the rules and guidelines that need to

come with such a commercial endeavour. Whether looking at the ads that have been created and trying to figure out how their creativity was formed or by creating new ads themselves, students also get a picture of how they may be manipulated through such simple techniques as colour choice, pictures used, or hidden persuaders in addition to alluring text. This, too, can be an important lesson for many students. Enjoy making the most of the authentic language, the short, compact but complete efforts that are right at our fingertips in newspapers, magazines, on the radio, television or on the Internet and see what creative ideas your students can produce.

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13

Mobile learning

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In this paper we explore mobile learning, also referred to as 'm-learning' or 'learning with handheld devices'. We analyse what it is and what the implications of the rise of mobile learning are for English language teachers. We also examine a number of classroom tasks and the concept of mobile literacy.

WHAT IS MOBILE LEARNING?

Exactly what we mean by mobile learning is the subject of some debate (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Traxler, 2009). Does mobile learning refer to the mobility of learners—the idea that one can learn anytime and anywhere—or to the portability/mobility of mobile devices themselves? Both of these aspects are clearly important but current definitions also emphasize the importance of context. This refers to the ability of mobile learning to encompass both formal learning within the classroom, and informal and formal learning outside the classroom, across myriad devices, in a variety of physical and temporal arenas. Interaction with mobile devices is only one part of the picture; of key importance in any discussion of mobile learning are the interactions that it supports and the ways in which these lead to learning.

Sharples, Milrad, Arnedillo-Sánchez, and Vavoula (2009) define mobile learning as "the processes (both personal and public) of coming to know through exploration and conversation across multiple contexts among people and interactive technologies" (p. 225). This view is supported by Kukulska-Hulme, Sharples, Milrad, Arnedillo-Sánchez, and Vavoula (2009):

> the mobile technology, while essential, is only one of the different types of technology and interaction employed. The learning experiences cross spatial, temporal and/or conceptual borders and involve interactions with fixed technologies as well as mobile devices. Weaving the interactions with mobile technology into the fabric of pedagogical interaction that develops around them becomes the focus of attention. (p. 20)

Part of the challenge in arriving at a single definition of mobile learning has to do with the fact that it is a rapidly changing field, with new and more sophisticated handheld devices constantly appearing on the market. The devices themselves used in mobile learning can range from mobile phones and tablet computers to MP3 and MP4 players, digital cameras, and gaming consoles. However we define m-learning, it is clear that when we talk about the use of mobile devices in education, the discussion needs to be framed within the wider context of pedagogy and learning.

M-LEARNING IN ELT

Definitions aside, the increasing ubiquity and accessibility of mobile devices and access to mobile networks globally is beyond dispute. Despite continuing barriers to mobile learning in education, which include technical constraints, cost, and attitudinal factors (JISC, 2012, pp. 43-44), mobile learning is on the rise. This has important implications for educators, who need to first recognize this fact and then take advantage of it. Kukulska-Hulme (2009) sums this up as follows: "To a certain extent, by dint of their ubiquity, mobile devices are already influencing

how people learn; on the other hand, educators need to do more than just watch it happen" (p. 158).

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has indeed made an appearance within the field of ELT, first around 2009 with the appearance of mobile 'apps' (applications, or programs) for language learning developed by the British Council, closely followed by major ELT publishers producing stand-alone and coursebook-related apps (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012). However, beyond this content-driven approach, the implementation of MALL in ELT to date in individual classrooms has in the main been ad hoc and limited to early adopters. This is in stark contrast to mainstream education, where large-scale projects integrating MALL into curricula, such as MOLENET in the United Kingdom, or school and university initiatives, such as those by Forsyth County Schools, Abilene Christian University, or Kansas University in the United States, have been running for several years. Likewise, research into the integration of mobile devices into classroom teaching in countries such as Australia has tended to focus on mainstream education (Pegrum, Howitt, & Striepe, 2013; Pegrum, Oakley, & Faulkner, 2013). In the field of ELT, the British Council is implementing larger scale app-based mobile learning projects in developing countries such as Sudan and China, but as this is relatively new territory for English language teachers, ELT-related m-learning research studies are still few and far between. The dearth of studies is compounded by the facts that the rapid evolution of devices makes longitudinal research studies difficult (Pachler, 2009, p. 4) and many institutions actively ban the use of mobile devices in classrooms (JISC, 2012, p. 3).

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Although there is a reductionist tendency within the field of ELT to equate mobile learning with the use of apps on smart phones or tablet computers, with learners accessing this content outside of class time, there is no reason why mobile devices cannot be integrated into formal learning both inside and outside the classroom. For teachers to take full advantage of the potential of mobile learning, it requires a shift in thinking about not just where mobile learning can take place, but also a realization that mobile or handheld devices have many more affordances than simply the consumption of language in prepackaged apps. As with any technology, it is not the technology itself that enhances teaching or learning, but rather the use to which it is put. In this context, it is useful to distinguish between mobile learning activities that focus on consumption of content, and activities that encourage the production of language.

Learning activities can be designed which simply substitute a mobile device for a traditional tool, or learning activities can be designed which would be impossible to carry out without a mobile device. It is these latter activities that fully realize the potential of MALL. Puentedura's (2010) SAMR model is one that can usefully be applied to the design of mobile learning activities for ELT. The SAMR model

suggests that technology can be used in learning activities in the following ways:

- Substitution: technology acts as a tool substitute, with no functional change
- Augmentation: technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement
- Modifications: technology allows for significant task redesign
- Redefinition: technology allows for the creation of new tasks previously inconceivable. (Puentedura, 2010)

The SAMR model describes the use of technology in learning tasks, from the simplest (substitution) to the more complex and innovative ones (redefinition). The SAMR model sees Substitution and Augmentation as ways to enhance learning tasks, whereas Modifications and Redefinition allow for transformation.

CLASSROOM TASKS

To clarify the SAMR model, how might each of these stages translate into classroom tasks with mobile devices? Below are task examples for each stage of the SAMR model using mobile phones (although other handheld devices such as tablet computers could be used to carry out some of these tasks).

At the simplest level, a mobile learning task that involves Substitution might involve giving learners short dictations, which they take down as SMS text messages or in a note-taking function on their mobile phones. Here we simply substitute a mobile device for pen and paper; the dictated texts can be saved and shared electronically.

Going up a step in the SAMR model, a mobile learning task that involves Augmentation might involve learners using the text function on their phones to create a chain story in groups, which is then uploaded to a blog, with comments from other groups, classes, or even parents (of young learners) solicited. In this task, although the phone text function has again substituted for pen and paper, by creating a chain story in electronic format and sharing it via a blog, we have added a level of 'functional improvement' and enhancement: the stories can easily be shared with an audience beyond the classroom, inviting interactions that would otherwise not be as easy to achieve.

A classroom activity reflecting the SAMR model's Modifications stage might provide learners with the chance to work in pairs, rehearsing and video recording short oral presentations on their phones. In this case, the mobile device allows learners to practise, record, and re-record until they are happy with the final version. The class time spent on repetition and rehearsal provides learners with intensive language practice and no loss of motivation, by giving them the chance to examine their output immediately in relative privacy and to improve their performance on subsequent takes. Once learners have produced a final and

polished version of their oral presentations, these can be shared electronically via a video-sharing site, a class blog, or a wiki. In this example, the use of mobile technology has transformed a traditional oral task and resulted in a significantly higher proportion of class time being spent on repetition and rehearsal, an important part of language learning. And as with the chain story example above, the final products can easily be shared electronically with a wider audience beyond the classroom.

Finally, a classroom task that allows for Redefinition as per the SAMR model might use the affordances or functions of a mobile device to create a completely new task. For example, a treasure hunt that uses GPS (global positioning system) enabled devices for learners to receive clues to be solved in specific locations in or outside the school. This creates a completely new learning experience and comes closest to the definition of mobile learning that foregrounds the potential of mobile learning to straddle various contexts. For examples of such 'geolocation' tasks with EFL learners see Fox (2011) and Driver (2012).

MOBILE LITERACY

The classroom activities outlined above suggest a certain amount of familiarity with mobile devices on the part of teachers and learners. This familiarity, which we can refer to as 'mobile literacy', is an increasingly important skill. Parry (2011), for example, argues that "The future our students will inherit is one that will be mediated and stitched together by the mobile web" (p. 16). He adds, "Teaching mobile web literacy seems to me as crucial as teaching basic literacy" (Parry, 2011, p. 16). Integrating activities such as those described above into our classroom practice, especially those activities that enable the transformation of traditional classroom tasks through the use of mobile devices, can help learners develop their mobile literacy within the context of English language learning. The future is increasingly mobile, and it behoves us to reflect this in our teaching practice.

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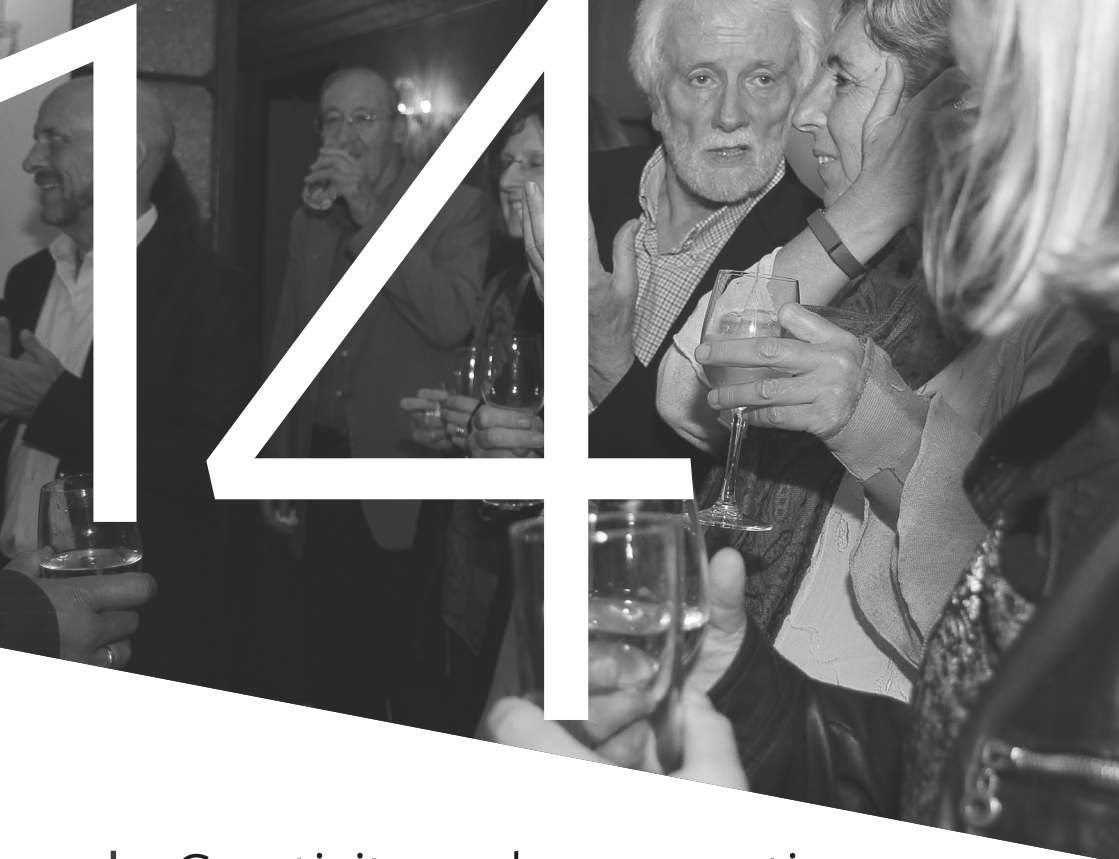
Creativity and conversation:
key concepts in spoken grammar

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This paper looks at the notion of creativity in relation to conversation and considers what this means for the teaching of conversational strategies for natural and successful interaction. Drawing on corpus evidence, we identify some of the strategic choices speakers make to realise their conversational goals and discuss how this affects teaching materials. In particular we consider research findings concerning the grammar of conversation, what these mean for the grammar syllabus and how aspects of conversational grammar might be effectively taught in materials. Central to this view of creativity is that the language itself is at the heart of everything we do as language educators and that its forms and functions must necessarily be overtly taught. Natural conversational language cannot simply be generated by creative activities alone. The language repertoire is the raw material of creation.

CONVERSATION, CONFLUENCE AND CREATIVITY

Conversation is an inherently creative activity. Apart from the most routinised phatic exchanges in small talk, conversations are unique, unpredictable and the products of the individual personalities who engage in them. Conversation is a specific genre within the broader notion of speaking as it is generally understood in language syllabuses. Speaking often includes monologic skills such as oral presentations, task-performances, group-work reports and the like. Social conversation is the daily, often seemingly banal, yet highly creative activity that most human beings engage in most of the time. As participants in social conversations, speakers not only create their own meanings, but, as Tao and McCarthy (2001) and Clancy and McCarthy (2015) show, they co-construct the talk. In doing so, they create or re-create and maintain relationships with their conversational partners.

The goal of many learners is to improve what both in professional and lay terms is referred to as *fluency*, a notion that McCarthy (2010) has developed to embrace *conversational* fluency or *confluence*. Confluence sees fluency as a property of the jointly-produced conversation as a whole, not just in terms of the output of the individual speakers within it. It recognises that all parties in a conversation have an obligation to keep a conversation flowing, not only by instigating and contributing new talk, but also by responding to the talk of others, as active listeners, showing engaged 'listenership' (see McCarthy, 2002, 2003).

To enable learners to participate confidently in confluent talk in English, as they might in any other language they know well, materials need to equip them with the language that speakers typically use in conversation. Language is, after all, what speakers use to express personal meaning, to interact with and relate to others, as well as to manage conversational topics and manage the conversation as a whole. How is such language to be generated? The advent of conversational corpora has afforded the profession with better and more reliable descriptions of what this language is and how it differs from other types of language, both written and spoken. Corpora reveal to us the strategic language choices that speakers make to realise their conversational goals and co-create conversation. It is within this context of natural conversational activity, the efforts interlocutors expend to create and maintain confluence and the language choices they exercise that we perceive creativity at work. Based on this perspective, we consider below some of the methodological issues with regard to materials that develop these competences in the classroom.

KEY FINDINGS FROM SPOKEN CORPORA: THE GRAMMAR OF CONVERSATION

Some researchers who study the grammatical differences between spoken and written corpora have come to the conclusion that it is precisely conversation that differs most from written conventions. Carter and McCarthy (1995), Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999), Leech (2000), Rühlemann (2006),

and Carter and McCarthy (2015) have all offered evidence for the existence of a 'grammar of conversation'. The grammatical forms and functions and their distribution which distinguish conversation from other modes of speaking and writing include forms that are common in conversation but rare in writing and vice-versa, as well as forms that have one function in writing and a different function or functions in conversation and, again, vice-versa. Many of these are exemplified in McCarthy (1998), Carter and McCarthy (2006), O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy (2007), Carter, McCarthy, Mark and O'Keeffe (2011), and Carter and McCarthy (2015). Here we just consider three illustrative examples: (1) co-construction, (2) the manipulation of the tense-aspect system and (3) the use of what Carter and McCarthy (2006), and Carter et al. (2011) refer to as *headers* and *tails*.

1) Co-construction

Consider this example from a spoken corpus; speaker A recounts memories of primary school.

A: We hardly did any science at our primary school. We did loads of erm... Some teachers were only interested in Ancient Civilisations.
B: **Which is nice**.
A: Yeah, **which is good**. **Which I liked personally**, but in terms of when I got to big school it was like we hadn't done half of the amount of maths we needed.
Source: CANCODE corpus (copyright Cambridge University Press)

Speaker A uses two *which* comment clauses, both agreeing with and paralleling the *which*-clause used by speaker B (*which is nice*). These *which*-clauses are not compulsory (it would have been perfectly correct if B had just said *That's nice* and A had added *Yeah, it's good, and I liked it personally*). The grammar is co-constructed (Clancy & McCarthy, 2015; Tao & McCarthy, 2001); it is an example of confluence, i.e. one speaker linking their turn to another's to create flow (McCarthy, 2010), and is a creative act, not a mere realisation of a grammatical 'rule'.

This kind of co-construction is important because it facilitates:

- Interpersonal bonding (the *which*-clauses are mutually supportive)
- The negotiation of meaning (speakers achieve shared understandings)
- Flow (confluence – the speakers work jointly to keep the conversation flowing)

2) The tense-aspect system

As noted in the commentary on the example above, the speakers *chose* to respond using *which* comment clauses. Another type of grammatical choice exercised by speakers is in the manipulation of the tense-aspect system to create meanings that

are not to do with time, as in the examples below. Example *a* is from a conversation in a travel agency in the UK, *b* and *c* are extracts from social conversations.

a.   We **were wanting** to book a trip to Sardinia.
b.   Sally **was telling** me they're moving to Birmingham.
c.   I looked over at Brian I **see** that his face **is** white and he**'s starting** to run.

Source *a* and *b* CANCODE corpus; *c* Cambridge English Corpus (copyright Cambridge University Press)

In example *a*, the use of the continuous aspect with the stative verb *want* is chosen as an involvement strategy, bringing the listener (here the travel agent) into the event. Second, although the speaker uses a past tense, the travel agent hears the utterance as a statement that the speaker still wants to book a trip to Sardinia, not that she has changed her mind. Here the speaker's use of a past form verb for a present reality is a politeness strategy, a choice made with respect to creating a good relationship with the travel agent. Example *b* is an instance of a past continuous reporting verb in an indirect speech report, whose use McCarthy (1998, ch. 8) describes as signalling newsworthiness as a topic management device. This usage is almost entirely confined to casual conversation. Finally, *c* is an example of the historic present in narrative about the past as discussed in Schiffrin (1981), a use which lends the events described more immediacy and conveys a more dramatic here-and-now feel than continued use of the simple past might achieve. The meanings expressed in the speaker's grammatical choices in all the above examples are *interpersonal*, to do with the relationship with the listener, as well as imbuing the events with noteworthy or dramatic status. The tense-aspect choice in example *a* is also important in that it facilitates politeness and indirectness – vital skills for any learner who seeks to operate in an English-speaking environment – which in turn create good relations. Finally, such choices allow speakers creatively to express their own perspectives on events. Again it must be reiterated that these are choices: perfectly correct alternatives are always available; this is the grammar of choice as opposed to the grammar of rules.

3) Headers and tails

We should not be surprised to hear speakers saying the following two sentences:

Anna, David's sister, is going to New York for her birthday.
Cars in Singapore are not cheap to buy.

But in fact, in our spoken corpus, what the speakers actually said was:

Anna, David's sister, **she**'s going to New York for her birthday.

They're not cheap to buy, **cars in Singapore**.

Source: CANCODE corpus (copyright Cambridge University Press)

In the first case we seem to have a doubling of the subject (*Anna* and *she*), something that would be frowned upon in formal writing and probably marked down in an examination. In the second case, the subject (*cars in Singapore*) seems to have been left till the end of the statement and a pronoun (*they*) put in its place, again a feature that would be extremely rare in formal writing. The double subject we refer to as a *header*: its function is to lead the listener into the topic by providing necessary information, a sort of stepping-stone process. The second case we refer to as a *tail*: these most typically occur when speakers are giving an opinion or making an evaluation. Both grammatical features operate interpersonally and, once again, are creative choices, not obligatory syntactic forms.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Clearly, the features of conversational grammar we have illustrated (along with many others) raise the question of their place in the syllabus and how they might be taught as elements of lessons where conversational fluency is the goal. Our belief is that conversational language can (and indeed should) be taught and that this includes and necessitates the teaching of grammar forms associated with conversation. These should not be viewed as inferior or substandard forms – quite the opposite. In terms of co-construction, the creative manipulation of the *which*-clause structure in the way described above and the equally creative manipulation of the tense aspect system are to varying degrees sophisticated skills to acquire, albeit the language forms are relatively simple and probably already familiar to students. However, these forms, in the way we have illustrated them (i.e. in their typical conversational functions as opposed to their uses in writing), should be regarded as proper features of one genre of English – conversation – and taught within that context. We therefore suggest that the teaching of spoken grammar features be taken outside of the grammar lesson and put within a conversation, interaction-oriented class. In other words, this is grammar that goes beyond the traditional grammar chart. The suggestion is <u>not</u> that the interactive use of *which* clauses should be learners' first exposure to relative clauses, or that the strategic use of the past tense for politeness should be taught at elementary level alongside the simple past for reporting past events. By the same token, the use of the historic present in narratives about the past is perhaps the most contentious of these spoken grammar forms and is probably best left until a high intermediate level has been reached. Rather we can think in terms of progression: teaching conversational uses of a structure as a development of learners' understanding of it, a widening of their language repertoire for strategic uses. Just as we might teach different meanings of an item of vocabulary at different times during a course, so we can

teach different uses and interpersonal meanings of a grammatical structure, a concept which O'Keeffe and Mark (in press) term *grammatical polysemy*.

Conversations based on corpus evidence in some form serve as the best vehicles for showing conversational language in a natural context. This is what Carter and McCarthy (1995) call 'illustration', the first step in their proposed alternative methodological paradigm of illustration-interaction-induction (as opposed to the traditional steps of presentation-practice-production, the so-called three Ps). Activities that ensure learners' comprehension of the conversation and perhaps discussion of it can be followed by a more focused look at the target language element in activities that encourage learners to notice the feature and, to use Carter and McCarthy's (1995) term, 'interact' with the text, for instance by finding more examples of the target item(s). This is simultaneously a language learning phase and an awareness phase, the value of which has been noted by Hughes (2002, pp. 59-61), who argues that this type of interaction with texts should be judged not just by how much speech learners produce but by how much they learn about why people make the choices they do in natural, everyday talk.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS: PRACTICE

The third element of Carter and McCarthy's (1995) methodological approach to teaching spoken language, 'induction', that is, the adoption of the target item by the learner as part of his or her own repertoire through renewed exposure, can be achieved through fluency-oriented and meaningful practice.

The conversation materials developed by McCarthy, McCarten and Sandiford (2012, 2014) observe a number of guidelines to facilitate learners' progress towards the goal of fluency. One guideline is that the practice items should be within the learners' repertoire; as suggested above, the conversation lesson is not perhaps the best the place for a first exposure to a grammatical item or feature. Just as the language should be mostly familiar, so should the activity types. These should be simple to explain, easy to set up for teachers and to navigate for learners. The activity type should not interfere with the prime goal of communication. An important guideline is that the topics and activities should be engaging to learners, not through the use of quirky pictures, offbeat topics or unexpected methodological twists and unfamiliar demands but by exploiting the creative elements of everyday talk. The themes and topics should be those that sustain conversations in everyday life because they are engaging and easy to talk about. Learners should be able to relate to the topics because they are the kinds of things they talk about with friends and family. To get a reliable handle on the typical subjects people talk about and the ways they do it, corpus evidence must be adduced in order to avoid personal bias and the belief that, because a topic is engaging for the materials writer, it will be engaging for everyone else. The corpus should be compiled with the end users in mind (e.g. Business English, Academic English, everyday conversations among young adults, and so on).

By the same token, the content of the practice items (i.e. conversational

exchanges, statements and comments) should contain recognisably representative examples of what people typically might say about a given topic. As such they are supportive of learners in that they provide examples of the kinds of things the learners themselves might want to say. Such items can therefore act as a **springboard for personalisation**, that is, learners are able to see how to use the content as the basis for making true statements about themselves and their own lives and experiences. For example, after practice in manipulating supplied answers to questions, learners then answer the questions in their own way, so that the answers are true for themselves. Similarly learners can make basic adaptations to supplied comments to make them true about their own world, experiences, or opinions by changing the verb (e.g. affirmative to negative), changing an adverb (e.g. *often* to *never*) or a subject (e.g. *my neighbour* to *my sister*). This phase of personalisation is perhaps the most important part of any practice element as it is not merely practice, but the first step towards induction and freer use. So much of what we present to learners as practice involves testing: testing that students have chosen or inserted the correct form. The conversation class, however, has interaction, fluency and confluence as its goals and should rightly focus on giving opportunities to use the target language as many times as possible in a personalised way.

Figure 1 shows a familiar activity type of a conversation gap fill, but the tokens – *which* comment clauses – may be less familiar. Students are invited to complete the activity and practise the exchanges supplied by the material in Part *D*. However, the greatest value of the activity is to be found in Part *E*. The questions in the main exercise can then be used by students as the basis of their own, true personalised exchanges, which they can model as closely or as widely as they wish on the activity items. The activity can be repeated with more than one partner because students are giving true information, which will be different for each individual.

FIGURE 1: PRACTICE OF 'WHICH' COMMENT CLAUSES

D ◀ᴺ CD1 **Complete the conversations with the comments in the box. Then listen and check. Practice with a partner.**

1. A What kinds of video clips do you tend to watch?
   B Mostly music. I subscribe to a few websites, _____ .

2. A Do you ever watch those video debates on news sites?
   B Yeah, they're good. People have very different views on things.
   A _____ . I like to hear different opinions – it makes you think.

3. A Do you ever upload your own videos online?
   B My brother does. He'll video anything – even the wall – _____ .

4. A Do you email video clips to your friends all the time?
   B No. It's a pain. I have a friend who's *always* sending clips, _____ .
   I'll only send one if it's really interesting or funny.
   A _____ .

a. which is kind of weird
b. which is a great way to find new bands
c. Which is interesting
d. Which is fine
e. which is really annoying

About you **E** Pair work **Ask the questions in Exercise D, and give your own answers. Add comments with *which* . . . where possible.**

(Source: McCarthy et al., 2012, p. 24)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Considerable advances have been made in the study of spoken grammar and the notion has made a positive impact on applied linguistics and language teaching in the last 20 years. The number of descriptive articles on spoken grammar is ever-growing (see Carter & McCarthy, 2015 for references), and with better description has come a greater acceptance of the numerous varieties that spoken English can boast around the world, each of which will have its own grammatical particularities as well as those it shares with other varieties. Spoken grammar has become a core element of descriptive grammars and pedagogical reference grammars and is increasingly found in course books, workbooks and other resources for language learners (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2012, 2014; Paterson, Caygill, & Sewell, 2012). With advances in technology we will also see more and more multi-modal corpora where speaking is combined with video evidence and other contextual data which will enrich further our understanding of the grammar of speaking, and especially that of our present concern, social conversation. We conclude with the hope that the long tradition of the 'conversation class' need not be a troublesome and tedious arena where topics are flung out to groups of learners who have neither interest in them nor the knowledge properly to talk about them. Nor should conversation be expected to appear as if by magic on the heels of well-intentioned, cleverly crafted activities but which nonetheless fail to provide exposure to the linguistic repertoire of conversation, the scaffolding, appropriate contexts, methodology and practice opportunities which enable learners to authenticate the material, to personalise it and to perform in a meaningful way, working towards the goal of confluence and successful interaction.

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Brain training for vocabulary

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Teacher: "What's your biggest problem with English?"
Student: "Vocabulary."
Teacher: "What's your biggest problem with vocabulary?"
Student: "Remembering words."

The exchange above represents one of the most common conversations surrounding lexis in an ELT classroom. Nevertheless, this paper does not aim to merely target this problem; it is broader in scope, in that it will also deal with problems in general that surface on account of inefficient techniques used by learners when tackling their issues with vocabulary. The recommendations found in this article are based on real life scenarios in class through my own experiences with learners from various backgrounds.

THE WRITTEN LEXICON

For some, it is the correct and appropriate use; for others, it is memory or even both. As with most problems, one must first look at the root of the issue and where it derives from in an attempt to come up with the best solution possible.

First language (L1) interference is commonly referred to as the origin of various inaccuracies – lexical inaccuracies not being an exception. The fact that students tend to record vocabulary using direct translation simply adds insult to injury in an already dire situation. This is demonstrated in eight different languages using the word *afraid*:

TABLE 1: AFRAID IN EIGHT DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

	Translation	Language	Part of Speech
	miedo	Spanish	Noun
	medo	Portuguese	Noun
	paura	Italian	Noun
afraid (adj.)	peur	French	Noun
	Angst	German	Noun
	怖い	Japanese	Verb

Through translation, words transform and mutate to such an extent that sometimes even the word type changes, as can be seen above. At this stage, with this information, a learner can be expected to recognise a word, comprehend it within context and know the spelling – and this is precisely where it all stops.

Recording lexis in such a fashion, no indication is given as to any of the words' collocations, derivations, connotations, idiomatic meanings, pronunciation, usage, synonyms or frequency. This is thus left to the student's imagination. In turn, this normally results in the student using the word in English in exactly the way that it is used in their native language through direct translation, as is demonstrated below:

TABLE 2: SPANISH, FRENCH, ITALIAN, GERMAN AND PORTUGUESE

Yo	tengo	miedo	de las	arañas
J'	ai	peur	des	araignées
Io	ho	paura	dei	ragni
Ich	habe	Angst	vor	Spinnen
Eu	tenho	medo	de	aranhas
I	*have*	*afraid*	*of/since/by/from (the)*	*spiders*

TABLE 3: JAPANESE AND TURKISH

私	はクモ		の怖い
Ben	Orumcek'	ten	korkuyorum
I	(*the spiders*)	*from*	*afraid*

The example above illustrates just a sample of the plethora of problems that inappropriate compilation of a written lexicon can cause as a result of the lack of information given about a word. Put simply, knowing the meaning of a word, does not mean one <u>knows</u> a word.

The difference in sentence structure, morphology and the general behaviour of words differs from language to language, in some cases more drastically than others. For monolinguals this poses a more serious threat than for multilingual speakers. The fixed wiring of one's brain in line with the rules of a single language makes for higher resistance to the acceptance of new, different or unfamiliar concepts. In point of fact, the lack of tolerance for these new concepts needs to be addressed as much as the new concept itself. Explicit demonstration and the raising of awareness of the difference play a major role in the long term progress of the learner's level of language. This can indeed be compared to stretching one's muscles prior to undergoing strenuous exercise in order to avoid injury.

THE MENTAL LEXICON

Learners' opinions of their own memory range from a self-proclaimed photographic memory to that of a goldfish. What needs to be questioned is what a learner is doing so as to build up their mental lexicon and, more importantly, how, as opposed to just being lucky or unlucky. As the title of this paper suggests, the brain can be trained in such a way as to improve retention and recall of lexis.

Through my experience and research into the theories behind the types of memory, the mental lexicon, and why we forget, it is evident that a language teacher must ensure that their learners permanently retain what they have been taught in long-term memory. Here are some methods that can be used to help develop and facilitate an efficient retrieval system for learners of English.

Upon taking a look at a learner's collection of written notes, it becomes more than clear that the notes and information from page to page are naturally organized in a chronological order, written in the order that the information was either presented to them or encountered by them. Let us imagine that two weeks ago, on Tuesday, the class had a lesson about crime. The simple question, "What did you do in class two weeks ago on Tuesday?" is usually countered with, "I can't remember!"; whereas the question, "Can you tell me about crime in your country?" will be complemented by a discussion using the language covered in the same lesson that was just referred to.

Another glimpse into the way memory works can be demonstrated with

another similar exchange, by asking for recall of lexis in two different ways:

i.   Think of a word that begins with P...that is a fruit
ii.   Think of a fruit that begins with B

When asked which of the two was carried out faster, or even more easily, there is general consensus that the latter option is the answer to both questions. This is due to the fact that the brain organises lexis into groups. The term 'group' is here used loosely owing to the fact that a group may be organised according to anything from sound to spelling, topic to personal experience, preference to phobia.

In the case portrayed above, the former instruction entails that the subject retrieves the group of words starting with a 'P' and sifts through that group to find a fruit. The latter instruction entails that the subject retrieves a group of words that are all fruits and sifts for one that begins with a 'B'. To put it simply, it can be said that the 'P' group is much larger that the 'fruit' group, and therefore requires more processing and brainwork in order to come up with the answer.

Another activity that can be done to demonstrate the presence of these groups is that of using lexical fields/sets, which can be compared to labelled boxes. If you ask someone what comes to mind when you tell them the contents of the box, they will tell you what that which is written on the label. Should you tell someone what is written on the label, they will tell you what is in the box. To exemplify, prompting someone with the words Euro, Pound, Dollar, Lira will provide you with 'money', whilst prompting them with the word 'countries' will provide you with a long list of countries.

The above points made with regard to both the written and mental lexicon need to be explicitly demonstrated to learners of English. Learners need to be made aware of the differences, and other issues that contribute to the various difficulties one can encounter when learning a new language. The context within which most of us teach is one where learners of a language are set in their ways, with particular reference to the pedagogical style that they have become accustomed to through the mainstream scholastic system of their home country. This shift in teaching style and ethos needs to be addressed from the get-go so as to set the foundations on which an individual may build upon in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Reorganizing the mental lexicon

Assigning meaningful tasks that resemble real life situations, as well as creating a need for the learners to participate, will undoubtedly force learners to analyse and process language more thoroughly. This helps learners store words and their

meanings to long-term memory. Rather than asking students to simply memorize a group of words, I have found it much more helpful to ask them, especially those of lower levels, to reorganize the words according to personal preference.

Taking a learner's set of notes (the same ones mentioned in the section on the written lexicon earlier in this paper) and asking them to reorganise it according to their personal preference, in the way that they feel comfortable, in groups that they can relate to, can help with recall. The process of sifting through information and getting the learners to write out these groups indeed bridges the gap between the mental and written lexicon. This is achieved by making the written lexicon resemble, as much as possible, the mental lexicon it is contributing towards.

The result is a collection of lexical sets, words, phrases, language points and other items, organized in such a way that the brain can relate to directly without the need for it to sort it out itself while you are asleep. As a matter of fact, it seems that this process helps the brain sort out the information beforehand, thus allowing it more time to transfer the language learnt from the short-term memory slots to the long-term memory slots and create shorter, faster paths to the information within the brain itself, facilitating recall.

In other words, one can say that the process through which one goes to place the language into personalised groups is training the brain to be faster, stronger and better when using the said language items at hand. The process of sifting through the information, accepting the information into a group, rejecting an idea, ruling out an idea and simply attempting to fit an item into a group trains the brain and improves the reaction time related to language, leading to a higher level of automaticity. That is to say that the semantic processing involved in organising the groups of words, such as types of houses or food, helps learners organise the words in their own memory, thereby making recall at a later stage much easier.

Prioritising the Mental Lexicon

Another "trick" one can resort to so as to improve retention and recall of lexis is to prioritise information. In actual fact, studying and deciding what is and what is not important or personally relevant, further contributes to the amount of processing that goes on. Consciously prioritising lexis with regard to what a learner might say is a very important or relevant word to them or what in their opinion are the easiest words, are but a few ways of getting the brain to refer to or even make use of the language in question, albeit mentally. A form of reverse psychology may also be employed here: asking students to write down the lexical items that they feel they will never remember. More often than not, these items turn out to be the first items on the list of things that they remember.

The process of personalisation is the key to what helps with retention and recall. Needless to say, we tend to remember matters that we have a direct connection with, things that are personally relevant, especially those that we are highly opinionated about.

Reuse, Recycle

To help with the storage of words and their uses in different situations (style, register, variety), recycling lexis is an obvious option. By carefully spacing out the use and reuse of lexis, certain problems inflicted on the retention of new lexis caused by other learning activities are in fact targeted. Bringing up a lexical item at a later stage and using it in a different context by giving different examples each time, I expose the learner to its different uses. As a case in point, I frequently use this example with Hungarian learners from a pre-intermediate to high-intermediate level: "I'm afraid of spiders" to introduce "afraid" and "I'm afraid Mr. Smith is not in the office" at a later stage to recycle and show students a different and more formal use of the word "afraid".

Visualisation

Asking students to visualise lexis by getting them to draw a picture that "makes sense" using the words at hand is another, sometimes more engaging, way of getting students to produce lexis. As with the previous recommendations, the end result is not what matters; what is fundamental is the process or journey that one embarks upon, in that it is what forces the brain to do its work. The process of thinking about what something looks like, whether it can connect to the other item you are thinking of, how you can draw it, what the relationship is between all of the items, and any other thoughts using the lexis at hand helps to establish connections in the brain, synapses, that will also allow for faster recall and better retention.

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE BEHIND THIS?

It is widely accepted that the synapses of the nervous system play a fundamental role in the formation of memory. As neurotransmitters activate receptors across the synaptic cleft, the connection between the two neurons is strengthened when both neurons are active at the same time, as a result of the receptor's signalling mechanisms. The strength of two connected neural pathways is thought to result in the storage of information, resulting in memory. This process of synaptic strengthening is known as *long-term potentiation* (Lynch, 2004).

An analogy that can be presented to understand the above is to think about the part of the brain that deals with memory as a large complex system of destinations all connected by roads of a different standard. Some are superfast highways or even Maglev train ways. A lot of time has been spent on these paths and the information found in those destinations is imperative, used frequently and therefore needs to be easy and quick to access. Other destinations are only visited occasionally and are connected by bumpy dirt roads, even a simple walking path that takes rather long to get to. When we discover a new destination that is crucial, we will travel along the path many times and realise that the destination is important and will, as a consequence, attempt to connect to it from various

locations and gradually build a transport system that will support the amount of traffic that the roads will have to undertake.

Training the brain using the activities mentioned earlier is one way of improving the infrastructure that is memory. By using target lexis over and over again, thinking about connections, relevance and associations, the synapses are firing off with electric pulses and each time two are fired up at the same time, the connection is strengthened and that is what is said to improve retention.

WRAPPING UP

At the end of the day what it all boils down to is hard work and perserverence. As with achieving any kind of results, be it for health and fitness, academic achievement, financial gain or improving one's memory, motivation and will power play a major role. There is no motivator better than success itself. The benefit of the activities above is that results are achieved immediately and that these results are tangible and clearly evident. The sense of accomplishment, that Eureka moment, when you realise that something actually works, is what triggers the start of a chain reaction where success leads to achievement, which in turn leads to motivation, engagement, deeper learning and more success, and the virtuous circle goes on.

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16

Pronunciation: hitting the groove of the music of English

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Three themes are explored in this paper. Firstly, 'bottom up' (progressing from single sounds to syllables to word stress to the 'music of the language' to the meaning) compared with the opposite – 'top down'. Secondly, Mathetics – a way of looking at the design of teaching behavioural skills (including the behaviour that is pronunciation) and using this and other pedagogical approaches in both creating new material and incorporating other material presented in traditional pronunciation practice books and online resources. Finally, we suggest some useful 'hands on' activities to maximise student interest and motivation, and ways to measure students' achievements when working 'top down'.

INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines approaches with which we are experimenting in helping students to acquire good English pronunciation. 'Creativity' means 'new'. As such we as yet make no claim for empirically verifiable results of our experiments. We do claim there are good pedagogical reasons for conducting these new ways of addressing pronunciation and from that discovering 'what works' (see Von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002). Ultimately, that is the only justification for anything – and our hope is that those who try what we suggest will share their experiences with us too, so we can build a combined picture of best 'new' practice in this area. Early indications from England about the central principle in teaching English pronunciation is that 'this works'.

There is no doubt that pronunciation is often not the most common or interesting part of EFL lessons – either for students or for teachers. It is very often neglected, found boring and because of that, as stated by Brown (2014), it is treated as something of a Cinderella in the ELT world. What can be done to change this perception?

PROBLEMS WITH COMPREHENSIBILITY

First, what exactly is the problem experienced by students in acquiring good pronunciation? We should make it clear that we do not mean that teachers should not try to get everyone to speak English in a 'BBC/Oxbridge' way. It is the issue of comprehensibility – the main function of any language: the expression of meaning. This is beautifully expressed by students at an emotional level as 'frustration/humiliation': "I have spent years studying grammar and vocabulary, but when I speak, nobody understands me." We have all been there when trying to communicate in a foreign language. In Chinese, pronouncing a word differently can change the meaning entirely. An English girl's name is 'Nicola'. Extend the 'o' slightly and in Mandarin the Chinese hear the equivalent of "I am crying." Imagine her shock and bewilderment when introducing herself ("Hello, I am Nicola' and being met with (at best) the response "Oh, I am so sorry" or at worst people walking away!). There is an echo of that in English. Today a Hungarian told us he was growing a 'bird' while he meant a 'beard' – he had pronounced a different English word perfectly which affected the meaning. Yesterday an Italian told us he had eaten 'baby sick' for dinner and it was delicious, when he meant 'squid' – but pronounced 'sick' perfectly: what a big change in meaning!

In summary, our primary concern is not 'BBC English', but 'good enough' pronunciation. We are indebted for the phrase 'good enough' to the work of Winnicott (1953) in the use of 'good enough mothering', which implies no 'idealistic perfection' to which all mothers (or speakers of English) should aspire, but conserves the notion that there are many different ways of doing something – they just need to be good enough. For us, 'good enough' means 'good enough for the central purpose of any language – the expression of meaning'.

BOTTOM UP AND TOP DOWN

The classic approaches to addressing these problems tend to be 'bottom up'. Teach the phonemes, build into clusters (e.g. consonants and 'cluster busters'), later get into word and sentence stress, etc. Not least we add to the learning load of the students and ask them to learn the phonemes as well as English when arguably the phonetic alphabet is yet another language on top of English (and so, so boring for students!).

Nevertheless, we believe the phonetic alphabet is very useful for teachers; we simply question its teaching to students as part of their L2 learning – particularly, when most free online dictionaries give the correct (auditory) pronunciation of any word.

And of course, with it come all paired sounds: sheep or ship, alive or arrive, back or bag, etc., all done to get the sound discriminations right. The Cambridge course books by Hancock (2003), Hewings (2007) and Marks (2007) on pronunciation are brilliant at showing these. We believe this has a place, but we do not believe it should occupy such a central place in helping students acquire 'good enough' pronunciation. Apart from the boredom of learning the phonetical alphabet and endless drills (with little meaning attached) come some curious entailments. The schwa – the commonest sound in English, the key to vowel compression and the music of English – rarely appears in sound pairs. This is a bit like "we'll 'teach' you everything first apart from the most important sound you need to be able to produce". Or take another. The difference between the voiced and unvoiced 'th'. Every sound pair exercise – online and Cambridge included – features this and lots of drills on it, but then, very late on in the Cambridge course books we learn that this is not important, and actually, it isn't because it doesn't affect meaning.

Is either of these acceptable entailments of 'bottom up'? We believe not, and forward the idea that one of the possible reasons for the general bad reputation of pronunciation is the 'bottom up' approach itself. It focuses on so many aspects of the language before reaching the essence/core, which is the actual meaning of the language (the word or a sentence), so that most parties involved in the process lose both the interest – and the plot.

So, what to do? Our contention is that we need a new starting place. Not bottom up – but top down, showing that every language has its own rhythm or music, that the reason Italians will say "I like'ah the..." is not solely because they do not understand the phonemes, but that they are trying to fit the sounds of English into the music of the Italian language and for that reason they need an extra syllable. A Finnish man introduced himself by saying "I am an entrepreneur"; well at least that is what he meant but he couldn't say it and it came out more like "I am an entre preener." A Brazilian woman struggled in a similar way: "I am a gynacooligster." We joked – you either have to learn to say "gynaecologist" in good enough English, or change your job! But for them, neither of these were joking matters – rather the focus of extreme embarrassment when early on in a 'small talk' conversation they would be asked, quite naturally, "What do you do?" So they

tended to avoid small talk conversations and in so doing deprived themselves of the one thing they needed: the opportunity to practise English.

This brings us to the main point – a new starting point: not phonemes, but the rhythm and 'music' of English – top down: how the schwa, our contractions, our pauses and emphasis of key meaning, carrying words and all the other parts that go into 'good enough' pronunciation, systemically interact to follow and recreate in a holistic way the 'performance' that is pronunciation and the communication of meaning. Students subconsciously 'fit' English into their own L1, but if they learn the music of English, most of the sounds (we are not saying all – particularly where these sounds do not exist in their L1) come naturally without needing to learn the phonetic alphabet. Because, as we tried to do with our students, when they are taught the rhythm they are able to articulate comprehensibly. We did something very simple: we got both the Finnish entrepreneur and the Brazilian gynaecologist to stand up and pretend to be – a train. With arms moving to the rhythm with words like 'Choo choo choo' – a method we attribute to Michael Manser, a tutor on CELTA programmes who during the course introduces the notion of a 'mumble drill'. With the rhythm perfected we reverse-chained the words. Still with arms moving: 'Choo choo cologist' – repeat; then 'Choo gynae cologist' – repeat; finally 'gynaecologist' and 'I'm a gynaecologist' for about 5 minutes. The effect – great pronunciation. And the reward? The smile on her face – and the renewed confidence in speaking English.

However, does this mean that we reject the bottom up approach? No. That is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It is just that from the perspective of top down we look at bottom up differently. At a conceptual level our approach is firmly based on sound pedagogical principles.

MATHETICS

With respect to the approach called 'Mathetics', foremost is the work of the educational technologist Gilbert (1962), who as a psychologist was a behaviourist (seen as somewhat unfashionable nowadays). But let's not forget that pronunciation is essentially a performing art – and as such a behaviour.

For those concerned with epistemology see Ryle (1949) and his distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' – particularly the analogy of the clown. To go further, see Von Foerster and Poerksen's (2002) comments about teaching within this conception of knowledge as 'knowing how':

> I wouldn't touch the idea of the transmission of knowledge with a 10-foot pole! You can't transmit knowledge. It can't be conceived of as a sort of object or thing that you can transfer from A to B, as you can do with sugar or cigarettes or coffee…turning an ignorant person into a knowledgeable one, operating like an alchemist who turns iron into gold. (pp. 69-70)

Gilbert (1962) claimed that all behaviour (and this includes pronunciation) can be described as three elements:
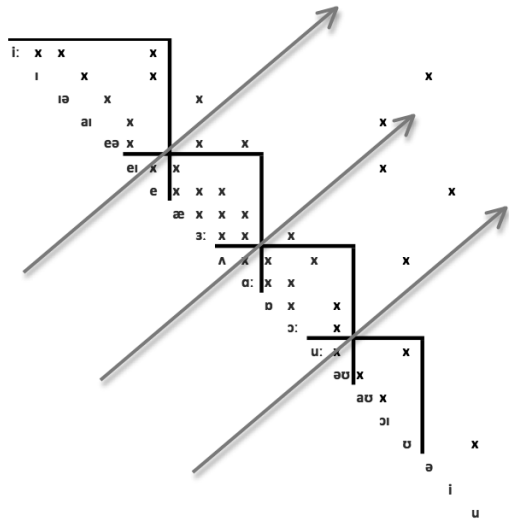
- a generalisation (think of homophones) – different spellings sounding the same;
- a discrimination (the province of sound pairs such as 'th' vs. 't' and heteronyms '**Po**lish' vs. 'pol**ish'**) – the same spelling, different pronunciation;
- a chain – what we are calling the 'rhythm or 'music' of English where individual sounds, whether generalisations or discriminations, interconnect in producing meaning in the sequential activity that is speech.

The key Gilbert (1962) emphasises in pedagogical terms is to 'make big steps'. At a practical level it is easier to backtrack into re-explaining in smaller steps than it is to re-invigorate their enthusiasm having bored them with too small steps. That means 'pushing' and challenging students: for example teaching discriminations together in 'chunks' so that the differences between them are clear rather than step by step in paired sounds ('voiced th vs. unvoiced' then 'th vs. 't' etc.).

The second factor in our thinking comes from Edney (1972). He makes a key distinction in instructional design between 'skills' and 'tasks'. Loosely interpreted, this is the distinction between 'the competences needed to perform a task well' (skills) and tasks (actually performing the task – here, conducting a meaningful conversation). For this, he develops a matrix to show the interconnections between them and how that matrix can be re-ordered to produce an efficient sequential syllabus.

We put these two ideas together in our approach to the teaching of pronunciation. For example, we analysed the sound pairs from the Cambridge series *English Pronunciation in Use* by Hancock (2003), Hewings (2007) and Marks (2007) and also the excellent web site http://www.tedpower.co.uk/minimal.html. Figure 1 represents the result of our analysis.

FIGURE 1: VOWEL MATRIX

i: x x   x
  ɪ   x   x
    ɪə   x   x
      eɪ   x
        eə x   x   x
          eɪ x x
            e x x x
              æ x x x
                ɜ: x x   x
                  ʌ   x   x   x
                    ɑ: x x
                      ɒ x   x
                        ɔ: x
                          u: x   x
                            əʊ x
                              aʊ x
                                ɪɔ
                                  ʊ   x
                                    ə
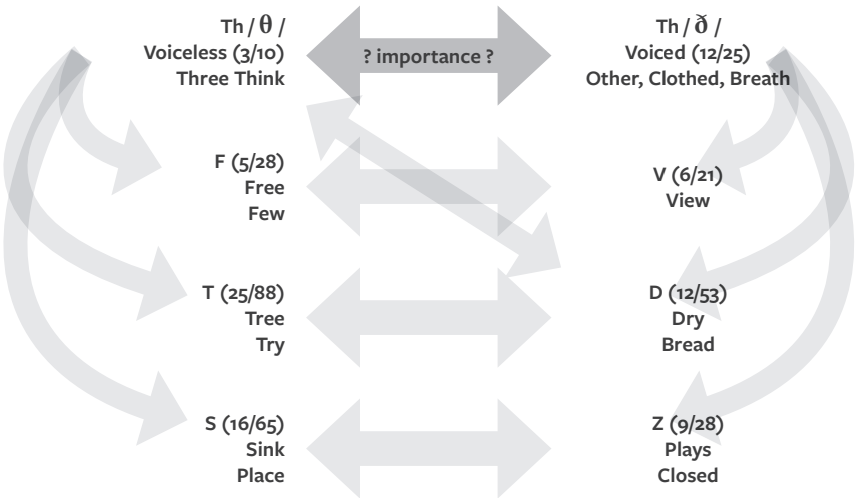   i
                                        u

You will notice some 'clusters' – we call them 'families'. And you will notice some arrows, which represent the need to create speaking tasks that build on the skills in these families – and by 'tasks' here we mean speaking tasks that require the use of music in the chain of meaningful English conversation incorporating the generalisations and discriminations that are needed to convey that conversation meaningfully.

From that we created 'family pictures' – see the example of the 'th family' in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: THE 'TH' FAMILY

Th / θ /		Th / ð /
Voiceless (3/10)	? importance ?	Voiced (12/25)
Three Think		Other, Clothed, Breath
F (5/28)		V (6/21)
Free		View
Few		
T (25/88)		D (12/53)
Tree		Dry
Try		Bread
S (16/65)		Z (9/28)
Sink		Plays
Place		Closed

This sets out clearly the discriminations we are trying to help our students with – as one big step in Gilbert's (1962) terms. And incorporating them into 'whole tasks' – in Edney's (1972) terms. These are tasks (whether songs, tongue twisters or as we say later 'guided free speech') that demand the use of all those discriminations and generalisations in speech within the chain which together create the music of English.

But analysis is not enough. Our tasks needed to be – well, anything that reinforced the rhythm and music of English. We analysed the obvious sources – limericks ('There was an old lady' etc.), tongue twisters ('She sells sea shells' etc.), songs with well known music internationally ('Happy Birthday', 'Jingle Bells', and songs by The Beatles) and realised that whilst many of these were great at getting over the music that is English, they didn't adequately focus on the full 'family of sounds' – like th – that students need. We have thus done a full analysis of the top 350 commonest words in English – our aim is to help teachers incorporate the commonest words into the tasks they create for their students.

Most teachers know that only 100 words account for 50% of all English. The problem is that there is not always agreement on what the commonest words are! Our guess is that by taking the top 350 words we will have 'hit' the commonest 100 on any list – and more. And if we can help students pronounce 50-60% of the most commonly used words in English in a good enough way we have definitely reached a good result.

IN PRACTICE OR HANDS-ON

What does this mean at the practical level of the classroom? The best advice would be to go 'top down' through play, e.g. we ask students to introduce themselves and say what they do (the most potentially embarrassing thing for any L1 student, when their nerves are on edge).

To improve what they are saying in terms of the rhythm and music we often ask them to sing – short rhymes or nursery rhymes, the way English L1 speakers learn the music of English. We could also ask them to sing other songs that they know, to get the music of the language too: 'Happy birthday' and 'Jingle bells'. Then we ask students to re-introduce themselves and many of their 'pronunciation problems' can be corrected this way – the Finnish man, after 5 minutes of practice, could say "I am an entrepreneur." Additionally, he was very proud and confident at being able to say that intelligibly.

But whilst 'getting the rhythm' of English corrects so many pronunciation issues, it does not correct all. There is the problem of what we call 'mouth aerobics': mouth shapes, tongue movements, breathing, particularly where the sounds do not occur in the L1. There are many techniques to cope with this that we suggest, borrowed from the bottom up approach, like: speaking with a Polo mint in your mouth, speaking like a fish with the mouth opening and closing and a paper in front of the mouth to check breathing. But most of all we do three things:

1. We talk about the foreshortened word conversation: A: "I English. You?" B: "Russian." A: "I London. You?" B: "St. Petersburg", and so on. The importance of this is to stress the words that carry most meaning. Full English requires "I am English" but really the only word that carries meaning is "English" so in speech we compress everything else to get the 'rhythm'. We practice that – and the key compression – the schwa for foreshortened vowel sounds.

2. We practice other compressions of the words that don't carry meaning – how we say them quickly, how we compress them together – we play around with writing them down in a funny contracted way and asking students to decode the message, e.g. "Wa d'u wanna do?" = "What do you want to do?" In the process we see the delight on our students' faces as they realise in listening to conversations that what they think is 'too fast', is simply, and very often, not adding to meaning.

3. Then we carry on practising the 'music' by dividing class into groups and asking students to say the sentences as fast/slow as they can, finish the sentence which the other group started, make two sentences rhyme, create a limerick, etc. All of this is done in order to bring the meaning and give students more possibility to practise saying whole utterances.

**FIGURE 3: PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE CYCLE**

'TOP DOWN' BUT UP?
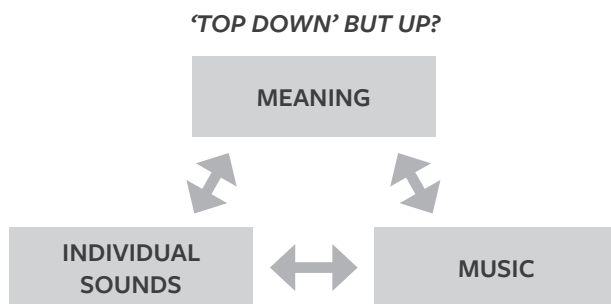
Does all this mean that we pay no attention to bottom up? No it doesn't. The tasks we create, following Edney (1972) and Gilbert's (1962) ideas, are designed to incorporate that. It is simply teaching, for example, the discriminations and generalisations together – using the commonest 350 English words wherever we can. Sometimes we get people to draw different words from a hat (like lucky dip) making sure they have phonemes from each segment of the family and get them to dictate a sentence using those words to the other students. The effect is dramatic as they realise how much the other students have or haven't understood the meaning!

SUCCESS MEASURES

But how do we know this works and, most importantly, how do the students know they have improved? Reassurance and being able to measure own success is a crucial factor in improvement and that self-motivating sense of progression. There are various techniques we are trying. One example is using recordings – students recording themselves saying the same sentence over a period of time in order to later compare the first and the last recording. Another example involves comparing their sentence with the same sentence recorded by their teacher using a programme called *Audacity*, which not only records the voice but also shows the sound waves.

FIGURE 4: SNAPSHOT OF *AUDACITY*

(Source: http://www.catb.org/esr/writings/taoup/html/ch06s01.html)
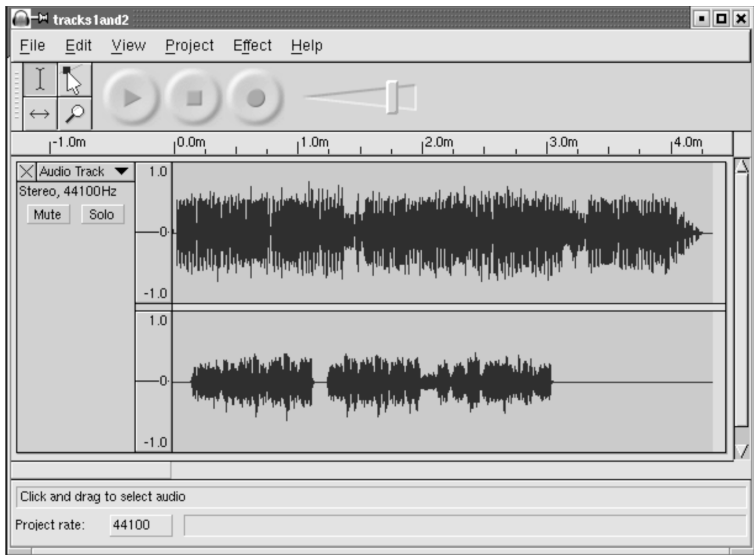
We are also thinking of real life situations for the students. Getting them out of their 'comfort zones' in the classroom and encouraging them to use English in real life situations through outdoor surveys (for example, of tourist attractions), interviews with other English speaking people – or just shopping! In this way, students can check whether other people struggle to understand them and if they manage to get their message across. Exactly the same exercise could be repeated at the end of the course, after the students have practised their pronunciation with the teacher to check if mis-understandings are lessened.

CONCLUSION

Pronunciation has to be embedded in the communication of meaning. That is what we are seeking to do and our experimentation will continue. We would love to hear your reactions to the above and learn about approaches that you are experimenting with when it comes to this Cinderella subject. Most of all, make it fun. A bit like the Mowgli song 'The Jungle Rhythm' in *The Jungle Book*:

That morning sun peeks over the mountains
And all the rhinos rub their eyes
*When they hear (*hear what?*)*
Hear the jungle rhythm
Those birds are tap-tap-tappin' the tree trunks
The busy bee hums as he flies
Loud and clear
To the jungle rhythm
Now you can hightail it out of the jungle
But it never leaves your heart
First you feel that beat start
Bubbling under
Then you hear the tom-toms
Loud as thunder
*(*it's moving me!*)*
Sounds a lot like being free
When you feel
Feel the jungle rhythm
Feel the jungle rhythm
(Source: http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/The_Jungle_Rhythm)

Key to teaching pronunciation is understanding that English is not spoken as it is written, but also that the way it is enunciated in oral speech – from foreshortened vowels with the use of the schwa to truncated '-ed' endings and contractions – makes the melody that is the music of English. Many pronunciation problems are created by trying to get English to 'fit' the melody of the L1 – and one possible key is learning to fit 'mouth aerobics' into the quintessential melody of spoken English.

Finally, we are firmly committed to the idea that pronunciation needs to be 'taught' as an integral part of ordinary lessons rather than a 'stand-alone'. In fact, a careful analysis of, for example, Marks (2007) reveals that many pronunciation problems can and should be dealt with as they arise. We also understand that many teachers at this level feel unconfident at correcting pronunciation. We have one simple word of advice – go for it! Even if English is not your L1, if you can be understood in English, then so will your students. You do not have to teach them BBC English; just being understood is what counts. This will spare them from frustration and embarrassment.

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Comprehending reading comprehension

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This paper explores comprehension within the wider context of reading. Comprehension is the most important outcome of any reading activity and the most difficult to monitor as it involves the interplay of a number of factors in reading a text, processing it, and understanding its meaning. The activity of reading comprehension sees the reader progress from understanding a text at the literal level to the inferential level and sometimes, on to the evaluative level. The paper first considers what theory has to say about reading in general and more specifically about comprehension by way of clarifying this complex process and highlighting the three levels of comprehension that take place when a reader engages with a text. It then proceeds to more practical considerations by offering ways in which reading comprehension can be monitored in a language classroom. In this manner, teachers can become more aware of what goes on during the complex process of textual comprehension so that this is improved.

INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact in educational practice that an increased understanding of the learning process in general enhances classroom practice in particular. This underscores the importance of an awareness of teachers' conception of reading in general and the role of reading comprehension specifically. This cognizance provides teachers with a "foundational knowledge" (Dole, 2003, p. 189) that greatly facilitates their classroom practice of reading comprehension. The advantages of a better understanding of both the reading process and the inherent comprehension process are manifold. First of all, this increased understanding "informs" (Niakaris & Kiely, 2015, p. 374) the various stages of the reading instruction lesson. Fisher and Frey (2014) also argue that, in effect, lesson planning and the nature of student response are improved. These checks "allow a teacher to determine how well the material has been learned and whether there is a need for additional instruction" (Rosenshine, 2012, p. 14). Overall, the teacher's own clarification of the mental activity occurring during reading serves to facilitate student comprehension.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reading

Reading is an elaborate process involving the intricate combination of a number of processes at play in the execution of any reading activity. Thus on a general level, it can be said that the skill of reading entails a "complex construct and that the process of making sense of printed text in non-testing contexts is a complex, fluid, and purpose-driven process" (Rupp, Ferne, & Choi, 2006, p. 442). More specifically, reading involves the intricate coordination of a number of processes, namely attention, memory, perception, and comprehension. The latter involves testing hypotheses, separating main ideas from detail, searching for cohesive elements, and contextual guessing. Indeed, there is a "'landscape' of activations, with concepts waxing and waning inactivation over the course of reading" (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 277). Efficient reading practice is the successful execution of "the complex, dynamic allocation and reallocation of attention...selectively letting go of extraneous information...activating background knowledge and reactivating information from the prior text" (Rapp, van den Broek, MacMaster, Kendeou, & Espin, 2007, p. 294).

Earlier views of reading considered the reading process as merely an act of mastering a "set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills" (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991, pp. 240-241) that start from the very decoding of letters at word level right up to conceptual-level processes that progress towards an understanding of the written text. Later research shows that reading theorists began to look at reading as not only an activity of decoding the printed form of the text but to also include the role of interpreting print through the use of prior or background knowledge; thus, researchers drew more focus on the role that the very same reader actually plays in the act of reading. Research began to consider the reader who plays the

leading role of unlocking the meaning of the written text. In an attempt to reconcile these bottom-up and top-down views of reading, researchers suggested "the typical compromise solution" (Grabe, 2009, p. 89) in that reading is now being considered more precisely as "a set of flexible, adaptable strategies" that are used instead "to make sense of a text and to monitor ongoing understanding during reading" (Dole et al., 1991, pp. 240-241). It is this view of reading that best captures the manner in which reading comprehension is achieved.

Reading comprehension

There is common consensus that reading is a meaning-seeking and meaning-constructing process that requires effort on the reader's part if a written text is to be understood. The cardinal achievement of any reading process is to acquire comprehension of the main idea in the reading text (Grabe, 2009).

The term 'reading comprehension' is loosely described in educational literature as a process where "meaning is constructed from print" (Tovani, 2000, p. 17). Reading for understanding is defined as a "highly interactive phenomenon in which different interactions take place through the activity of reading" (Vahidi, 2008, p. 146). Grabe and Stoller (2002) confirm that reading for general comprehension, when accomplished by a skilled fluent reader, requires "very rapid and automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general representation of main ideas, and efficient coordination of many processes under very limited time constraints" (p. 14).

Reading comprehension is a "multivariate skill" that initiates from "the very basic low-level processing abilities involved in decoding print and encoding visual configurations to high-level skills of syntax, semantics and discourse, and to still higher-order knowledge of text representation and the integration of ideas with the reader's global knowledge" (Nassaji, 2003, p. 261). At the lower level of reading comprehension, it is sufficient that the reader is satisfied that the content he/she encounters during reading makes some sort of sense. For this to be achieved the reader must know the meaning of most of the words and he/she must see that they hang together grammatically and conceptually. At a higher level, where a text is usually made up of a series of sentences, understanding is more than putting the sentences together. At this level, reading comprehension becomes "an active, dynamic, and growing process of searching for interrelationships in a text" (Rapp et al., 2007, p. 292), which entails the identification of the meaning of the text as a connected whole rather than a series of individual words and sentences.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reading comprehension is by no means an easy task for classroom practice. It poses a challenge for the student who is trying to master the process and also for the teacher who is trying to monitor the process. However, reading comprehension does not remain such a daunting task when there is a shift of focus to the highly

varied ways in which both teachers and students engage with a text.

The following activities for teachers are based on the essentials of reading comprehension by way of generating a greater awareness of this mental process in order to achieve better comprehension. These will, in turn, form the basis for a number of activities that can be used in the classroom to gauge students' understanding.

Teacher activities

These activities (Tennent, 2015, pp. 20-23) were selected for the purpose of engaging teachers to reflect on their own reading comprehension practice. The complex interplay of all factors entailed in reading comprehension confirms that it is precisely this reading for understanding that is the most intriguing and challenging of all skills as it is relatively invisible and can only be inferred but never be directly accountable for processes in exactly the way that one can hear or see that a particular linguistic form has been integrated or not (Bernhardt, 2011).

The activities are designed to encourage teachers to know their own reading practice. First, they are invited to write down all the reading activities typically undertaken on a normal day, to also note the reading material encountered, and to discuss which of these reading activities are work-related and which consist of reading for pleasure. Initial discussion tends to be rather limited as reference is first made to the obvious and perhaps expected responses, such as the newspaper, school emails and students' written work. Further reflection yields a wider and more interesting range of reading activities, such as blogs, recipes, washing instructions, parking notices and tickets, games instructions, food labels, alcohol content, etc. This awareness of reading practice prompts further discussion as parallel lists of students' own reading practice are drawn up, and teachers consider their own students' reading material, preferences and texts. Differences are naturally noted and acknowledged.

A further activity is concerned with the particular manner of engagement with the various texts as teachers are invited to consider a list of processes that generally occur during any reading activity. Teachers reflect on whether and to what extent such strategies are in action during a normal reading activity, and whether and to what extent these are consciously applied or not. When reading, do you...

- think about the title and/or illustrations?
- tell what you think will happen next or what you will learn?
- ask yourself questions as you read?
- ask yourself if what you are reading makes sense?
- if you do not understand, do you reread?
- think about the main idea or important part of the story?
- tell the important things in your own words?
- ask yourself whether you liked what you have read?

- ask yourself whether you agree or disagree with it?
- ask yourself whether you learnt anything new?

Another activity delineates comprehension-related teaching issues by means of a discussion of the nature of reading comprehension. Teachers are presented with a number of definitions of reading comprehension, such as:

- The construction of the meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message. (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 39)
- To process text meaning through some process of interaction with print. (Alderson, 2000, p. 3)
- The ability to understand and make use of information provided in a variety of forms and entailing a variety of sign systems. (Pugh, Pawan, & Atommarchi, 2000, p. 25)
- A function of both the ease of processing the text and the inferences generated by the reader. (McNamara & Kendeou, 2001, p. 36)
- The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 11)
- The ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately. (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 9)
- A multivariate skill...the very basic low-level processing abilities involved in decoding print and encoding visual configurations to high-level skills of syntax, semantics and discourse, and to still higher-order knowledge of text representation and the integration of ideas with the reader's global knowledge. (Nassaji, 2003, p. 261)
- An active dynamic, and growing process of searching for interrelationships in a text. (Rapp et al., 2007, p. 292)
- A complex cognitive skill in which the reader should construct meaning by using all the available resources from both the text and previous knowledge. (Yazdanpanah, 2007, p. 64)
- A highly interactive phenomenon in which different interactions take place through the activity of reading. (Vahidi, 2008, p. 146)

A consideration of what research has to say about reading comprehension allows teachers to note which words/terms seem to be repeated; which definitions appear limited and why; which one/s tend to be preferred; how similar are these to their own definition of comprehension; and to what extent do these help to refine their own definition.

These activities succeed in eliciting the salient point that any reading comprehension activity or task involved in understanding a text – whether it is simply to recall what is stated in the text (literal comprehension), to interpret the author's

meaning through connecting information that is implicit in the text (inferential comprehension) or to go beyond the text by relating what is read to prior experiences and knowledge (evaluative comprehension) – requires a different level of cognitive processing by the reader. This increased perception of the reading process and the inherent comprehension will affect classroom practice and ultimately assessment (Basarabi, Yovanoff, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2013).

Student activities

These activities in turn inspire teachers to move away from the type of "comprehension *products* or representations" (Oakley, 2011, p. 280), namely a set of questions, oral or written, that are typically set to check understanding. Instead teachers can transfer their own ways of engaging with a text for understanding onto their own preparation of tasks meant to check their students' understanding of classroom texts.

Teachers were willing to do so differently and shared creative, hands-on ways that could easily be adopted and adapted accordingly. The following ten activities, shared by teachers, could tap into the students' understanding of a text.

These five tasks could be used in the context of a narrative text:

1. Students could perform all/parts of the text, highlighting key characters, conflicts, main ideas and themes. A photograph of the students in their new roles is taken, who in turn are shown the printed photograph and asked to explain what it happening in the book at the moment they were acting.
2. Students, working individually or in pairs, could write an alternative ending to the narrative, which would indicate whether the main conflict has been grasped.
3. Students could be guided to keep a diary or relate the main events of the narrative from the perspective of one of the characters.
4. Students could draw or paint aspects of the narrative or discuss what they would dress the protagonist, and how to furnish a setting that is in keeping with the main ideas of the narrative.
5. Students could bring a shoebox in which they place items/objects that they associate with the character/s or setting or a favourite scene of the narrative.

These five tasks could be used in the context of an expository text:

1. Students are paired and one pretends to be 'the teacher'. They should review the lesson with their partner by explaining and summarizing all of the main points. The partner must think of at least two questions to ask their 'teacher'. Have students switch partners and then switch roles so each student gets to be the teacher and practise explaining.

2. Students could write points or brief notes on the board. This can be a fact, rule, or an example. Students could be asked to design brochures, adverts or labels which give brief information on the main concept in the text.

3. Students learn best when they can associate new material to things they have already learned. Students then reflect on the new topic and group it or relate it to a previously studied topic or something else they know. Students can then create Venn diagrams or concept maps to link related topics or highlight differences between them.

4. Students are given two notecards on which they write 'true' on one and 'false' on the other. Then, a statement about the text is read out. Students should hold up their respective notecard and check those held by the others to make sure they all agree. In the case of false statements, students need to note the inaccuracy.

5. Students could create an advert of the product or process that they are reading about, including the items of information and detail from the text.

These activities are by no means exhaustive. Some very helpful sites are:

- https://goo.gl/sKMJwc
- http://goo.gl/DvCssE
- http://goo.gl/bKkvUd

CONCLUSION

Checking for understanding is an integral aspect of second language teaching and learning. It becomes all the more meaningful if the tasks set genuinely focus on students' engagement with the text, their understanding, and their own reactions to the text.

Rinvolucri (2008) argues that this manner of approaching reading comprehension check "is respectful of the students' right to find out what they feel they have not yet grasped...links the course book passage to real people in the room... [and] reduces the teacher's preparation time (if she is in the habit of creating her own comprehension questions.)." Furthermore, this ensures "an alternative that accommodates a variety of working styles" (Shoemaker Holdren, 2012, p. 692), thereby allowing for differentiation.

It is only in this manner that students really feel engaged with the task at hand as it is rendered relevant. They are able to gain independence in that they can monitor their own performance. The various ways employed to check understanding demystifies the grey areas in the text and clarification is achieved. In such cases, feedback is immediate as participation in the task ensures this. Overall, comprehension does not remain daunting but becomes an engaging exercise where effective teaching and learning are guaranteed.

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A case for engaging learners in mainstream education: an ESL approach

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As two teachers from the private English language sector, we were given the opportunity to teach mainstream classes in two separate local colleges. Our initial impression was that there was a great deal of reluctance and even apathy towards learning English. Inspired by Sri Aurobindo's essential components required to engage students and going beyond engagement as a mere hook to catch student attention, we designed our lesson plans on the basis of our own interpretation of Aurobindo's recommended elements: relevance; choice; contribution; and challenge. Once we had delivered our lessons, we found that levels of student interest and participation were much improved, with a move towards a more positive reaction to the lessons and learning English. In this paper, we note that carefully devised lesson plans incorporating the four elements mentioned above work well towards fostering a better sense of engagement with the lesson, encouraging student participation and contribution, and stretching intellectual challenge.

INTRODUCTION

With a background spanning over 20 years in the private English language sector, we were recently given the opportunity to apply our English language teaching skills to mainstream education. Teaching classes in separate colleges, we both found that when it came to student attitude, teaching local students was different to teaching foreign students on a language holiday. Local students attend lessons all year round and get stuck in a routine whereas foreign students are excited by the novelty of the temporary language stay and their motivation levels are higher. We both experienced very low levels of engagement when teaching English to mainstream students: although they participated in the lessons and passed their exams, the students seemed to be merely going through the motions. There was a huge lack of interest in the lessons with students sitting towards the back of the classroom and demonstrating a reluctance to use the target language at all. We both felt compelled to stimulate student engagement with the lesson content by using an ELT approach, which, we believed, would enhance student interaction and the learning experience. Going beyond engagement as a mere hook to stimulate interest, we incorporated four elements essential for engaging students into our lesson plans. This paper will explore what is required for student engagement and will consider two case studies where these four concepts were applied in the lesson design and delivery, the first focusing on a listening skills-based lesson and the second on a reading-skills based lesson.

BENEFITS OF ENGAGED STUDENTS

Even if students participate in lessons, albeit minimally, and make the pass mark, there is evidence to indicate that engaged students achieve better results all round. Research carried out in Australia over a 20-year period indicates that students who are engaged at school tend to become high achievers getting good grades, continuing on to further education and clinching managerial roles (Abbott-Chapman, Martin, Ollington, Venn, Dwyer, & Gall, 2014). The findings further indicate that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds that are engaged fare better than their more privileged yet disengaged counterparts. Moreover, more opportunities seem to present themselves to the high achievers (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014). Engaging students in ELT speak is often associated with the teaching approach ESA – engage, study, and activate – and serves to hook student interest in the lesson topic. Genuine engagement is more than delivering lessons that are enjoyable and entertaining. Sri Aurobindo, revered Indian philosopher and educator, maintains that engagement precedes learning. To Aurobindo's (as cited in Price, 2014) three ingredients for engaged learning – 'activities need to personally matter to the students'; 'students need to actively buy into their learning'; 'teachers need to build in intellectual stretch' into lessons – we add another element of our own – students need to interact with the learning content and their peers. Replacing each of these four concepts with key words

– relevance (activities need to personally matter to students); choice (students need to actively buy into their learning); contribution (students need to interact with the learning content and their peers); and challenge (teachers need to build in intellectual stretch into lessons) – we incorporated these elements into our lessons in order to better engage our students.

LISTENING-SKILLS LESSON (LARISSA)

Background

The cohort of students were studying for a qualification in sports education, one of the course components being a course of study in English with set criteria examined annually. The class consisted of mixed levels ranging from A2 to B2. The preliminary lesson material selected for the English component of their course of study was based on sports and had been adapted from ELT sources; however, the students were not motivated by the topics, which they found to be staged or dated, and participation levels were extremely low during the lessons. Upon reflection, it was decided to consult the students and ask them what lesson material would interest them. Theoretically, this would allow them to partake in the decision-making process about lesson topics and material, giving them the opportunity for **choice** and also provide the opportunity for the materials to be more pertinent to their interests and therefore provide **relevance**. The students were a little forthcoming and expressed an interest in lessons that had an audio-visual element, notably film. In order to incorporate their suggestion into a lesson that would also have a learning focus, apart from passive and entertaining features which were probably closer to their wishes, a lesson based on the film trailer of *Invictus*, a film about the late Nelson Mandela using a national sports event, the Rugby World Wup, to unite the political and social divide that was then present in South Africa, was designed and adapted for their level and interests. The film topic was also of contemporary international interest as the world had just celebrated the first anniversary of Nelson Mandela's passing.

Delivery

In order to elicit the topic and spark some anticipation, the students were shown a poster picture of the film. It appeared that very few of the students had seen the film. Once the genre, topic, main protagonists, and situation were established, the students were then presented with some quotations from the trailer containing words or phrases they might find challenging – the meaning of the words and phrases was elicited, the intention being to facilitate understanding of the trailer. Next, three questions were posed to the class, the answers to which the students had to listen out for when they viewed the trailer. The students watched the trailer once and gave appropriate answers to the questions. Students watched the trailer for a second time and were then asked questions focusing on concepts

that were philosophical and that touched on the political situation in South Africa as well as the personal, thereby appealing to the higher order thinking skills and incorporating **challenge** into the lesson. As an extension to this task, the students were then told that they were going to see an interview with the actual captain of the South African rugby team, Francois Pienaar, and were asked to write down three questions that they would like to ask him if they were interviewing him, the intention behind this being to set up an opportunity for **contribution**. The students were then instructed to watch the interview and listen out for answers to their questions. Some students did find answers to their questions and they readily shared these with the class when prompted. Next, the students were presented with a transcript of the interview with missing words, which they completed while listening to the interview for a second time. As a follow up interview, the class was divided into three groups and were asked to create an interview with Nelson Mandela. Each group was given a particular stage in the event: group 1, the build up to the World Cup; group 2, the World Cup; group 3, after the World Cup. The students appointed their own Nelson Mandela and journalist from their respective groups and took it in turns to act out the interview in front of the class. This last task further added to the element of contribution. A creative extension to this might be to have the groups film the interview and post it on a social media page that is accessible only to the class members.

Result

The reaction from the students was very positive and encouraging. The poster, which introduced the film, sparked their interest and their curiosity even though the topic focussed on rugby rather than their preferred sport, football. They thought they were going to watch part of a film and were a little disappointed when they realised it was just a trailer; nevertheless, they cooperated with the pre-listening tasks. The listening-out-for-answers-to-the-questions task served to get them to pay attention to the trailer. Being sports students, once they found the task interesting enough, they soon started to display a competitive streak, which helped to nurture a positive atmosphere. The students took a longer time answering the higher order thinking questions in the post-viewing task, as these were a lot more demanding and thought provoking. They readily engaged with the questions about the personal, which were motivational as well as inspirational. The students asked questions about the trailer, which led to a discussion about South Africa, apartheid, and the black and white social divide. By this time, the students' interest had been captivated and the film footage of the interview with the real captain of the South African rugby team was very well received. The authenticity of the interview further validated the real-life events that the film was based on. The students readily participated in the pre-listening task and gave serious consideration to the three questions they were individually asked to write in preparation of the interview. After viewing the interview, some of the students

who had their questions answered in the course of the interview were keen to share their questions and answers with the class. It was evident that they had asked questions that they were genuinely interested in. The extended activity with groups preparing an interview with Nelson Mandela was a little more challenging for them since this was free practice and they did not have a solid framework. Some of the questions they targeted were fairly simplistic and easy for them to also come up with Nelson Mandela's probable responses; others were more open in range and the students were more creative in coming up with the interviewee's answers. The interviewers and interviewees were quite self-conscious at having to perform for the class, but once the first group set the ball rolling, a congenial atmosphere was set and it became easier for the others to follow suit. The aims of the lesson – to engage the students' interest and set tasks to encourage more student and peer participation while focusing on listening skills – were achieved. A huge difference was noted in terms of willingness to participate and interest in the topic.

READING SKILLS LESSON (JEAN)

Background

A different cohort of students was on an A-level English course that featured the study of a set text. These were 16-17 year olds in the first year of their course and were generally strong B1 to B2 in their English proficiency. The tutorial part of the course was designed to encourage them to think critically about the set text and be able to offer opinions and hold in-depth discussions about the features of the narrative, context and characters. The initial tutorial sessions proved that the students felt disconnected from the set text, *The Heart of the Matter* by Graham Greene. The students did not communicate amongst themselves, found it uncomfortable to speak individually to the teacher, and were generally reluctant to participate. They admitted to disliking the book, as they could not empathise with any of the characters, all of whom seemed lifeless to the students. Some students further admitted to not reading the book and studying only the study notes as these appeared to be more accessible than trying to interpret the original text. It was decided that the students needed to be shown meaningful ways in which they could interact with the original text and its characters. It was hoped that the students would see the connection between the text and their own experiences and schemata. In order to achieve this, a series of games were devised using the principles described above. Each of the games involved different ways of making the material personal to the students and, thus, more **relevant**. Each of the games was carried out in groups or teams, increasing the aspect of collaboration and the possibility for **contribution** by individuals. Many of the games involved imaginative play, such as role-play, dialogue-writing and guessing games, so the students were allowed **choice** of outcome, material or context. Finally, almost

all the games had an aspect of competition, whether it was against each other or against time, which led to increased levels of **challenge**. One example of these games is described below.

Delivery

The game detailed here was one of the first trialled with the class. Without informing the students what they would be used for, six different categories were elicited from the students on the board. These were: transport, weather, food, music (songs), clothes, and countries. Next, as many character names from the set text as the students could remember were elicited on the board, e.g. Scobie, Louise, Ali, Helen, Wilson, etc. Then students were asked to choose two partners to work with, making three groups of three students each. The groups were instructed to choose four characters from the list of characters on the board; however, they were also given the condition that they should only choose characters who they like or find interesting in someway. The groups were then instructed to choose a scribe who would keep notes of their discussion. The students were then set the task of taking each of the four characters in turn and making four different associations from the categories on the board. They were told to answer the following question:

If _name of character_ was a _name of category,_ what would he/she be?

It was clearly explained that the students needed to explore what the character would BE, not what they would use, wear, ride, etc. For example, if Scobie were a means of transport, what would he be? The groups did not need to choose the same categories for each of the characters, but they had to only choose from the categories on the board. Furthermore, the students were told that they should all agree on the associations before proceeding to the next character. The groups were given 15 minutes to carry this out. During the final part of the game, the groups were tasked with reading out their list of associations while the other groups guessed which character they were referring to. Points were awarded to the groups guessing correctly.

Result

This game is significant in that the students appeared very perplexed and unsure of the activity when they started but considered it a success by the end of the session. Firstly, some students needed to be introduced to the idea of association. This was done by talking logically through some of the choices available to them and then encouraging them to rely more on gut-feeling for associations once they had got the hang of how they are created. Most of the students found this first stage interesting because of the unusualness of the task and all the students participated to some degree. It was observed that incidents

or character personality traits from the text were being discussed in the groups as students explored the more abstract aspects of what they were doing. In some cases, where the character was well established, there was nearly instant agreement on the association; in other cases, the discussion was prolonged as individuals in the groups realised that their impression of a character differed from that of their friends. In actual fact, the 15-minute time limit was extended to 30 minutes at the request of the students. At the point of the game when the groups were asked to read out their list of associations for others to guess at, a few of the students expressed disbelief that it would be possible for people not involved in their discussions to be able to decipher who they were referring to. These students were pleasantly surprised that other groups were able to recognise the character from the associations and felt their choices had been validated in that they had 'succeeded' in finding appropriate associations for this to happen. However, this was not always the case. Because points were being awarded, guessing groups were eager to check why certain associations had been made and the speaking group was sometimes asked to justify their choices. At times, characters were discussed in-depth when groups tried to prove their opinions. Careless or 'silly' associations were found unacceptable by guessing groups who felt that this unfairly hindered them from gaining points.

CONCLUSION

In both cases, we noticed a significant increase in engagement. Students became more willing to participate, happier and more comfortable in their learning environment; over time, they were better able to communicate. The outcomes and targets of each of the courses were successful and it was felt that this was directly related to the adjustments made in the material and approach. **Relevance** of material had been lacking and this shortfall had been addressed. Drawing from the students' own interests (in the case of the sports students) or their experience and schemata (for both groups) opened possibilities for interaction by the students to the course material. On these courses, **choice** was offered to the students, both on a large scale, such as when deciding lesson topics, and a smaller scale, for instance when eliciting material from the students to be used in the lesson. Indirectly, choice was also offered by using tasks that allowed them to use their creativity and imagination to interact with the material. The students' **contribution** was maximised wherever possible through the involvement of the students in decision-making processes, the eliciting of ideas, and the possibility for them to create parts of the lesson material. The need for appropriate levels of **challenge** cannot be underestimated. Challenge was achieved in several ways: by using English from authentic material in both cases; by setting time constraints on activities which were achievable but tight; by incorporating competitive elements to the work; by ensuring that the students fed-back or performed to the whole class increasing the need to be

fully prepared; and by guiding the students with focussed, supportive feedback and correction at all times. It was felt that this approach enabled the students to become more engaged with the lessons and, ultimately, achieve a better learning experience.

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Bringing management training into the Business English classroom

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This chapter provides a brief survey of the historical development of Business English (BE) and proposes a schema that identifies the various disciplines which BE now embraces and which can serve as an organisational framework for needs analysis, syllabus and course design for trainers, as well as an educative instrument for learners. It argues that BE trainers are well-placed to offer wider than just language support to learners who aspire to work effectively at international level; and offers some practical ideas for the training room which can be used either with a primarily management training objective or a language and communication training objective in mind, or both.

THE CONTEXT: THE EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS ENGLISH

BE, as a recognised branch of English Language Teaching (ELT), has only existed for around 40 years since it started to appear as an offshoot of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the late 1970s. As the label suggests, BE in the early days focused mainly on language provided in business contexts. Business-specific lexis was a further differentiating feature. But since then, BE has broadened its ambitions considerably, as an examination of BE publications or the conference proceedings or website of the Business English Special Interest Group (BESIG) of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) will show. BE trainers have responded to the realisation that language mastery alone does not necessarily lead to professional success by widening their brief. BE today has a greater and more complex ambition than just teaching language: it aims to help learners to perform effectively in an international professional environment. Indeed, a more accurate denomination than 'Business English' today might be 'International Communication'. Given this wider scope, the range of possible learner needs also becomes wider to the point of becoming bewildering and confusing. The schema proposed in this chapter offers an organisational framework for BE today which can serve both trainers carrying out needs analysis, syllabus and course design; and learners in relation to their gaining greater understanding of their own learning profile and needs.

WHY REFOCUS?

Why is there a need for BE to widen its scope in this way? If for no other reason, training establishments and trainers have to respond to the expectations of sponsors – typically, companies that pay for their employees to learn English because they need the language for their jobs: if there is no perceived return on their investment, then sponsors may reasonably question the value of the service they are receiving. A simple focus on language improvement may not necessarily translate into improved professional performance. Trainers and training establishments will also do their learners a service if they encourage them to think first not about language objectives but about what professional outcomes they wish to achieve and to work back from there. Language improvement thus becomes one means to achieve these professional ends rather than an end in itself.

A second reason for refocusing is in relation to learners. BE students traditionally divide into two types – in-service and pre-service, those already working and those preparing to work. Pre-service students are typically in universities or business schools where English and other language competences are regarded as essential to career success in today's global marketplace. In the in-service sector, however, BE notions of what constitutes an employee working internationally still lag behind reality, as the hackneyed illustrations in BE course books of models dressed in business suits shaking hands in airport meeting rooms continue to testify. The

truth is much less elitist: receptionists have to deal with foreign visitors and handle calls coming in from across the world in English; trade union reps have to communicate with migrant workers in English; badly paid, seasonally employed workers in the hospitality sector not only have to speak good English but – as for the other examples I have given – have to exercise a range of intercultural and interpersonal skills successfully in order to do their jobs well. In a sense, we all work internationally now, or at least educational and training systems should be designed as if we did.

Thirdly we need to take into account how the world of work is changing. Because of globalisation and the increasing pace of technical change, all educators bear a responsibility for preparing their learners to cope with a world characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) – true domestically and even more relevant in an international context. Because BE trainers have historically been associated with a more rudimentary form of preparation for international working, they now have the opportunity to prepare learners for this more difficult environment in a correspondingly more comprehensive way.

A SCHEMA FOR BUSINESS ENGLISH TODAY

For learners who have enough English to be able to function at a basic level in an English-speaking work environment, say CEFR levels B1-B2, improving language competence becomes just one area among several which may need to be included in a course designed to improve the learner's ability to function in an international context. To do this, in fact, requires competence in five main areas:

1. Language skills
2. Professional communication skills
3. Intercultural skills
4. Interpersonal skills
5. Leadership skills

Let us examine each of these in turn.

1. Language skills

Lower level students who lack the nuts and bolts of English continue to need to focus mainly on learning more language but once a basic level of competence has been attained, then even the language focus in the course should shift somewhat. People working internationally need to understand that while improving accuracy and fluency are both important, the objective of BE language training is to make them use the language more effectively. This is achieved through the right balance of fluency and accuracy. Older learners in some countries like France have a particular preoccupation with accuracy and so it is useful to help them to see that at work, unlike in school examinations, achieving desired professional ends

through the effective use of language is more important than achieving accuracy, which is only a means towards this instrumental end. Put another way, getting the deal signed or building a good team is more important than remembering the third person 's' every time. With this in mind, higher level BE language training is usefully characterised by a stronger focus on:

- improving language learning strategies;
- mastering specialist vocabulary with an emphasis on collocation;
- developing understanding of register and appropriacy;
- becoming aware of how much language is required in a particular job in order to be operational in that post (since sometimes learners want to learn more language than they actually need for what they have to do);
- understanding communication processes in order to use language to achieve successful communicative outcomes.

In other words, some of the time allocated to language training can be usefully given over to the 'how' and the 'why' rather than simply the 'what'. (Also, given the broadening of this approach to language to include sensitisation to the impact of the language one uses, there is a strong case to be made for offering language and communication training of this kind to native speakers of English to help them communicate better with non-native speakers, although persuading native speakers of their need for this can be challenging!)

2. Professional communication skills

In the early 1980s, trainers and writers began to respond to the growing perception that even with a competent grasp of BE language, learners were not necessarily being equipped to deal successfully with the professional contexts in which they were required to operate. They also needed language, skills and understanding of how to present, meet, telephone, negotiate, write and socialise in order to be effective in these situations. Initially, materials designed to meet these needs tended to adopt a predominantly situational and functional approach, breaking down each context into a number of stages (like, for presenting, for example, the introduction, linking stages, dealing with questions, using visual aids, and so on) and providing language gambits appropriate to each stage. There is now such a plethora of both course book and dedicated materials of this kind available that it can safely be stated that professional communication skills (PCS) training has become a core component of mainstream BE. Latterly, we may also trace evidence of a more generic approach to these different contexts with the aim of encouraging learners to understand the communication processes underpinning each and all of them: they all involve an opening, a relationship building stage, agenda setting and objective fixing, discussion/problem-solving/negotiating, decision-making, summarising and closing. By reflecting on and learning about the ingredients of

successful communication, learners become better communicators themselves, in English and in their own languages too. In this way the dividing lines between language training on the one hand, and other kinds of soft skills training on the other, begin to become blurred.

As a footnote to this section on professional communication skills, it is worth noting a more recent addition to the list of contexts in which working people communicate internationally – that is to say, virtually. Telephone conferences ('telcos') in particular can be chaotic in the absence of protocols and/or experienced chairs and communication can quite often break down altogether. BE trainers have the opportunity to support their learners to achieve better outcomes in this context too, not just by providing them with useful language but also by helping them to a better understanding of the processes they need to put in place in order to reduce frustration and improve communication.

3. Intercultural skills

Just as the 1980s was the decade that saw the rise of professional communication skills training in BE, the 1990s saw the beginning of a long process of integration of intercultural skills training too. Learners were by now being equipped with the specialist language they needed for their jobs and with the professional communication skills they needed for the different communication contexts they operated in. However, a lack of intercultural awareness – comprising appropriate behaviours, knowledge and skills – could still represent a significant obstacle to achieving desired professional objectives. Given that this area is an even broader and more complex one than the last, it is not surprising that there is less sense of consensus about what should be taught in this respect than for PCS, although this is not to say that this will not emerge in time: as an academic discipline, intercultural communication is also relatively young. Consensus or not, many BE materials and course books now incorporate an intercultural strand in their syllabus design and the recognition of the need for some elements of intercultural training is widespread. There is a continuing absence of a standard professional qualification for BE trainers equivalent to the CELTA and DELTA for mainstream ELT teachers but, on the other hand, some BE trainers do obtain accreditation in other kinds of qualification to become, for example, administrators for The International Profiler ® (TIP) designed by Worldwork Ltd. in London. This sort of qualification not only provides professional development to BE trainers but also a schema for needs analysis and syllabus design with specific reference to developing learners' intercultural skills. TIP itself proposes 22 behaviours and competences under ten main headings – openness, flexibility, personal autonomy, emotional strength, perceptiveness, listening orientation, transparency, cultural knowledge, influencing, and synergy. This represents one organising principle at least through which syllabus and course design can take place although there are of course many others.

4. Interpersonal skills

Most recently, in the current decade, some BE trainers have been considering a range of interpersonal skills which are also important to professional success both internationally and domestically, though likely to be more challenging to achieve in the former environment. Innovative work in this area by training organisations like York Associates is based on the premise that professional results at an international level can only be achieved through the building and maintenance of strong working relationships so that the development of understanding and competence in areas such as the building of rapport and trust, networking, influencing, decision-making, conflict management (for occasions when relationships are put under strain through the confusions and misunderstandings which inevitably arise in the international domain) and the giving and receiving of feedback all become additional components in the range of needs which the BE trainer can cater for.

We have now moved a long way from the language domain where some BE trainers may feel that their own competence and confidence principally resides. It must, however, be recognised that this shift is at least in part market-driven in that it is responding to the needs of both sponsors and learners as well as to growing understanding of how successful communication is actually achieved in these different domains. It is argued below that BE trainers are in some respects at least well-placed to respond to these growing insights.

5. Leadership skills

At the other end of the spectrum from language, we come to leadership: the need for the individual working internationally to be able to lead or play an effective role in an international team – often a virtual one – to lead an international project, or to function effectively across an international organisation. It is true that a fully-fledged management training industry already exists to support managers develop their teams and so on but most of the players operate within their own domestic markets and relatively few offer programmes which aim to develop the international communicative competence of participants, to sensitise them to the impact of different language choices in international settings or to build intercultural competence. BE trainers who enhance their own professional development by obtaining a business coaching qualification or accreditation in the delivery of a team development tool like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator ® (MBTI) or the Team Management Profile ® (TMP) will find these kinds of learning very useful for supporting learners with international leadership challenges.

FROM BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINER TO MANAGEMENT TRAINER

The idea that BE trainers need to be soft skills management trainers as well can be intimidating to say the least and some will decline to follow this path. However,

there are good reasons to believe that this direction may be less intimidating than it may seem at first. The management training seminar room can certainly be a very different place from the BE training room with different participant expectations and sometimes less tolerance too. On the other hand, some BE trainers underestimate and fail to articulate the skills they already possess. They are usually good linguists and, supported by their training experience, have a good understanding of how to communicate successfully in a foreign language. The job, by its very nature, provides the opportunity to develop high levels of intercultural skill and understanding, and some people management skills in terms of motivating and influencing. Most crucially, BE trainers usually know a lot about communication and communication processes even if much of this knowledge remains intuitive. These represent a solid basis for supporting people working internationally across the range of skills presented above, even if they come to the challenge from a different direction from their management trainer cousins. To offer one example, many managers undergo project management training but the soft skills component in this is often small or non-existent and international project leaders have often received no training in communication or intercultural awareness. It is a big but not an impossible step up for BE trainers to take to provide useful support here, once they have developed some knowledge of the hard skills involved. Unlike many managers working in a domestic environment (in the UK at least), BE trainers can identify and articulate good communication practice with some facility and should build on this talent.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

BE publications like *Leading People* (Flinders, 2012) and other titles in the Delta Publishing International Management English series are designed not only to provide learners with greater understanding of some of the soft skills they need for international working and practice in improving them; but are also specifically designed to support the professional development of the BE trainers using the books by helping them develop correspondingly better understanding. This section of the chapter offers a number of simple training activities which can be used both in management training seminars and in the BE classroom. A number of them are discussion-based.

Feedback

The objective of this activity is to develop understanding at the beginning of a course or seminar as to what feedback is in order to initiate the giving and receiving of feedback within the group from the outset.

The trainer asks:
- What is feedback?
- What is feedback for? (Short answer: to improve performance.)

- How do you give and receive feedback?
- How do you create a feedback culture?

Group disposition: plenary.

Presenting yourself (feedback exercise in triads)

The objective of this activity is to give course participants the opportunity to give and receive feedback to each other and also to practise presenting themselves professionally.

The trainer presents the situation: You are introducing yourself briefly at the start of a talk/round table at an international conference. What information do you give? For example:

- your name
- your job title
- your organisation
- its main activities
- your location
- your main responsibilities
- any other information you think is relevant

Group disposition: participants form triads. A presents to B (30-60 seconds) and C gives feedback to A (60-90 seconds). Participants then rotate roles and repeat the exercise twice. The trainer obtains feedback on the activity in plenary. (The trainer asks: "Will the feedback you received help you do better next time?").

What makes a good manager?

The objective of this activity is to stimulate discussion and thinking about the qualities of a good manager.

The trainer presents the question.

Group disposition: plenary with the trainer writing responses on a flipchart, or small group discussion (15 minutes) followed by reporting back in plenary.

Transfer: other questions/statements which can be handled in the same or a similar way are:

- What makes a good international manager?
- What makes a good project manager?
- What makes a good listener?

- Describe your best boss.
- Describe your worst boss.
- Describe yourself as a manager in six words.

The troubleshooting meeting

The objective of this activity is to practise meeting skills and to encourage team development through joint problem-solving.

Pre-briefing: participants are asked in advance to think of a problem, issue or challenge at work which they can present to the rest of the group in order to obtain suggestions as to how to deal with it.

The trainer outlines the procedure below before the groups break out.

Group disposition: ideally groups of four or five. Each group meets for 75 or 90 minutes. Each member holds the chair for 15 minutes. The first chair presents his/her problem (2 minutes), deals with questions of clarification (1 minute), invites discussion of the problem (10 minutes) during which s/he ensures balanced participation, and then summarises the discussion and the main suggestions coming from it (2 minutes) before handing over to the next participant. The meeting can be followed by feedback within the group and then in plenary.

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Afterword
Creativity: an afterthought

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This piece is of course an afterword, and creativity in the context of this book is as far from an afterthought as can be imagined. But creativity is often an afterthought in the broader context of our work as envisaged by education departments, testing organisations and the large-scale publishers that navigate and monetise the space between them.

I've often thought it would be interesting to give a conference talk which addressed the contents of the goodie bag delegates receive on registration, and which is quite often, let's face it, a baddie bag. Sample materials from disheartening course books, brochures for testing organisations, pens that – OK, the pens come in handy. Sponsored water! And yet we know the conferences might not run without these sponsors. And we drink the water.

But what message do these lavish packs give to young colleagues entering our field, and perhaps attending their first conferences? I think they serve to establish a dual narrative: one in which they are encouraged in workshops to be resourceful and creative, and one – the primary one, increasingly – in which they are urged in the wider discourse to be rigorous and precise.

Rigour and precision have their place, but they are not words that spring to mind when we think of engaging children with the world around them. Nor should they in the classroom.

So how do we redress the balance? How do we privilege the creative narrative that (after all, we are the ones running the workshops) is in fact our own?

What we don't need is a taxonomy of creativity for teachers to note down in talks, or a creativity standard with six (CEFR) or 80 (Pearson's Global Scale of English) levels.

We don't want creativity to become a chore, as unwelcome as homework or the washing up: "Have you done your creativity, children?"

Creativity can't be ticked off like content on a syllabus. It has to be in the fabric of what we do, part of our practice as teachers – just as it is part of our experience as people. Making marks, telling stories, shaping our limbs in dance – these are all fundamental to our sense of what it is to be human.

Creativity isn't automatic. We talk, usefully, about getting our creative juices going: as with cookery, as with sex, things don't start to flow without a little application.

What we do need is time, space and a little faith in one another. Creativity can happen on the grand scale – the public art commissioned by princes – or it can happen in the gaps: the scribble in the mind that turns into a song. Creativity can be part of a grand tradition, nurtured from the first plunks on a keyboard to the first notes of a symphony, but it can also be what happens when a parent on a rainy afternoon says, "Let's turn off the telly, power off our iPads, and bang a drum, paint a picture, make a play." And then something magical happens. Children who have been operating in saver mode come back to life like paper flowers in water. That's a grand tradition, too. But the public space made human by art, and the rainy afternoon made memorable, only happen because someone with the chance to shape the experience cared enough to do it.

Speaking of plunks on a keyboard (are they plunks or plonks?), we should be wary of technology in this context. For one thing, digital replicas offer too many options: what child will linger on the sound of a piano when their first keyboard can make insect noises, or tease out a basic melody when at the touch of the button they can fill the house with a mechanical 'Für Elise'?

Smart technology reduces whole body experience to micro-movements in our fingertips. But instruments jangle and vibrate strangely. The grass is hard beneath our feet as we run. Pencil lead is soft to the touch. All of this we feel in our senses, our skin, our bones. None of this can be fully replicated on a screen.

So I mean it about creative juices. You can't sing without breath, you can't paint without water. Let's be messy, visceral, juicy. Let's hit the notes and miss them too. Let's fill the wastepaper bin with drafts that didn't quite hit the mark. And let's make sure the mark is the best we think we can do, not what someone else dictates.

Giving teachers the space and time to nurture creativity cannot be an afterthought. It needs to be central to the project of education. But remember what's inside those conference giveaway bags: it ain't crayons and a tambourine. No one's going to make this happen for us. We need to stay on our toes if we want to dance, and sharing the ideas in this book with colleagues is a great way to start.

Let's keep that secondary narrative open to new colleagues and make it so compelling that it takes the lead in our test-stressed classrooms and tech-distracted homes. Let's make a mess, make a racket, start a riot – in the space available. And before the bell goes.

About the contributors

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Creativity in English Language Teaching
Edited by Daniel Xerri and Odette Vassallo

Creativity is a democratic phenomenon that all teachers and learners may embrace, both as individuals and collaboratively. However, fostering learners' creativity in the English language classroom depends on teachers' own creative practices.

This book presents the views of a group of teachers, trainers and researchers, all of whom share the belief that creativity needs to be an intrinsic aspect of English Language Teaching. The first group of papers by Alan Maley, Chaz Pugliese, Michela Formosa, Sarah Zammit and JJ Wilson underscore the vital importance of creativity's place in the classroom, especially since it is a fundamental component of a broad range of human activities, foremost amongst which is language use. The papers by Antonia Clare, Maria Cutajar, Sarah Cutajar and Stephanie Xerri Agius discuss how a culture of creativity can be cultivated in the classroom through the amalgamation of creative and critical thinking, and the mind shift experienced by teachers when they position themselves as creative practitioners. Rebekka Mamo, Alan Marsh, Jean Sciberras, Candy Fresacher and Nicky Hockly illustrate how the use of literature, poetry, art, advertising and mobile devices respectively can act as a means of spurring learners' creativity. The next group of papers by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, Kevin Spiteri, William B. Laidlaw, Justyna Rogers and Patricia Vella Briffa explore different language systems and skills, reminding us that language use is perhaps one of the most common creative feats that learners engage in. The final set of papers by Jean Theuma, Larissa Attard and Steve Flinders examine two different language learning contexts, both of which require a high level of communicative ability on the part of learners. The value of creative practices in language learning and teaching is applicable to such contexts and many others.

This book offers resistance to mediocrity and compliance... I commend to you this book as an example of how caring about teaching can be approached in multiple and uniquely creative ways. – Jane Spiro

As the papers in this book affirm, creativity often flourishes where it seems most constrained, and in classrooms not the least. – Scott Thornbury

Giving teachers the space and time to nurture creativity cannot be an afterthought. It needs to be central to the project of education... Creativity in the context of this book is as far from an afterthought as can be imagined. – Luke Meddings

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