MATEFL is an organisation run on a volunteer basis by teachers for teachers of English as a foreign language. It is dedicated to the professional development of its members by facilitating the sharing and exchanging of ideas and keeping abreast of new developments in the EFL world.
The main contributors for this issue

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Hello teachers,

Welcome to our Summer 2021 issue of the MATEFL newsletter!

As I take over from Matt and Tash as the MATEFL newsletter editor, I would like to thank them both for their great work as editors on 7 wonderful issues. My apologies for the slightly late issue this time, I think we can all agree it has been a rather hectic, and unpredictable, summer.

Here's a rundown of this issue:
Alan Marsh writes about creativity in teaching, and Matt Done reflects on teaching and learning.

Our June online seminar speakers give us a review of their workshops:
Aleks Mitovski gives the over-Zoomed teachers among us some handy tips and tricks. Natasha Fabri explores different listening strategies and activities in class, and finally Corinne Vella shares her practical experience with exploring mindfulness in action in the ELT classroom.

I also had a chance to interview Jean Sciberras, the ELT Council’s Career Service Award winner in last year’s annual conference about her teaching experience and people who influenced her.

I hope you will all enjoy this issue!

Have a great rest of the summer and see you all in our December issue!

Bob

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In this article Alan Marsh talks about creativity and language teaching. The MATEFL Honorary President is the co-author (with Antonia Clare) of The Creative Teacher’s Compendium: An A-Z guide of creative activities for the language classroom (Pavilion ELT).

Where do good ideas come from?

Perhaps it’s not surprising, but evidence suggests that most great ideas come when you’re not trying hard to find some good ideas! So if you’re looking for inspiration at work, or when planning a lesson, it’s probably more productive to leave your workplace or your computer and just focus on something else. Albert Einstein reputedly came up with some of his most brilliant ‘Eureka!’ ideas while playing the violin as a break from work; Charles Dickens would go off on daily twenty-mile walks to flee the constraints of his writing desk.

It is often said that creative inspiration comes when you’re least expecting it, when you give your mind a rest and don’t focus so intensely on the search for inspiration. It’s probably the same with language learning. As well as the overt classroom/school/coursebook syllabus that learners may be following, each learner has their mental, internal syllabus. Sometimes language points are noticed and acquired easily by a learner, whilst others pass them by – perhaps because they weren’t ready, mentally, to take them on and take them in. For example, we might be ‘doing’ the present perfect (again!) and learners consciously and intensely focus on an exercise to ‘get it right’. They do OK in the exercise but later ... it just hasn’t been taken in. They need opportunities to ‘notice’ the language feature occurring here and there, and maybe an opportunity to ‘play with it in a creative and meaningful way.

However, if we engage our learners in a task where the language point is only peripheral and they get involved in the task because they really want to communicate something meaningful, then all sorts of things start to happen. They start noticing features that may have passed them by, or aren’t explicitly being focused on at all by the teacher or the materials. This is probably how most new language features start being integrated into individual learners’ own, ‘internal’ grammatical/lexical syllabus. Pennies will drop, bells will ring, lights will be switched on. There’s an example of one such activity (the I have ... poem) at the end of this article.

What do we mean by ‘creativity’?

‘Creativity’ is a trendy word. The trouble is, it seems to mean different things to different people. Antonia (my co-author) and I really like the model provided by James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto (2009):‘the four-C model’ in which four different types of creativity are described.

**Mini-C Creativity.** This refers to the type of creativity that happens as part of the learning process, for example, when a child does a painting in class, or writes a story. It may not be brilliant or revolutionary, but it is personally meaningful to them.

**Little-C Creativity.** This refers to creativity in everyday life, such as throwing different ingredients together to make a new recipe, coming up with a creative solution to a problem at work, or dressing in a new, different way.

**Pro-C Creativity.** This refers to professional expertise – the creativity demonstrated by people who are experts in their field but haven’t (yet) achieved eminence.

**Big-C Creativity.** This is reserved for those who have achieved greatness through their creative genius – Picasso, Shakespeare, Mozart, da Vinci: their works and ideas have helped shape the world we live in.

As language educators, Antonia and I are mainly interested in developing Mini-C and Little-C Creativity amongst learners and teachers, respectively.
Why is creativity important in the classroom?
A good question. Here are six powerful reasons.

1 Contributing creativity helps learners to make the learning personally meaningful.
If a learner adds something of their own, they invest themselves in the learning that is going on and in a way they appropriate it. For example, in relation to what is being learnt or practised in their lesson, they might contribute to a discussion, or add a personal experience, or write a story or a poem or a rap, or draw a picture, design a graphic, take a photo in the street or mime an action. In so doing, they are making the learning personally meaningful to them. It becomes something of their own, something ‘inside’ them.

2 Creative learning is memorable
When as teachers we find a different way to approach a topic or focus on a new language item, or if we add a creative twist to a well-known activity (see the Show and Imagine ‘twist’ at the end of this article, for example), we are making the topic or the language point more memorable for our learners. If we ask our learners to use language in a creative way (for example, to give three facts about themselves using I used to but to include one which isn’t true – which their classmates have to guess), the language point is more likely to stay with them, in their memory. And when we involve their senses – and more than one mode of perception – and imagery (again, see the poem at the end of this article as an example) then far deeper processing is likely to happen. The deeper the processing, the more memorable the language becomes.

3 I feel, therefore I learn
Have you ever felt that buzz in the classroom when your learners are excited (in a competitive activity, for example) or laughing – or both at the same time? Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio point out that learning and the emotions are closely connected. Engaging your learners’ emotions, then, will affect their attention, motivation, decision-making and memory.

4 Creative teaching nourishes us
Here are some things that teachers do which they describe as being creative: finding a ‘fresh’ way of doing things; planning a new lesson entirely from scratch; looking for interesting ways to engage our learners; approaching things in an imaginative way; taking risks; experimenting with new ideas; bringing something of ourselves into the classroom; creating the freedom and space to think.

As we strive to become creative and to design successful, engaging lessons for our learners, we feel good about what we’re doing and our enthusiasm becomes infectious. Interestingly, we in turn motivate our learners who then respond with enthusiasm, which then on motivates us. It’s a kind of virtuous circle of motivation which helps us to remain fresh and enthusiastic in our work. Creativity, then, is not only a key factor in avoiding teacher burnout but also becomes a powerful engine for teacher-driven professional development.

5 The world needs more creative thinkers
It’s important to clarify that when we talk about creativity in the classroom, we’re not talking about an optional extra, something to be abandoned when time is a constraint, in favour of more ‘serious’ or ‘efficient’ learning. We see it as an integral part of the learning process. Creative thinking is now recognised as an important 21st-century skill by employers, administrators, policy-makers, educators and others. We need a new generation of creative thinkers to help us find solutions to challenges that we’ll face in the future.

6 Creativity is cumulative and cooperative.
‘I’d like to be creative but I don’t have lots of ideas.’ But there are lots of ideas already out there (including in our book!). Take an idea you’ve seen online, in a workshop or read in an article, adapt it, make it your own. Then, share it with others. Teaching can be a lonely profession but, by accepting and offering ideas and activities with others, we join the great tradition of the teaching community as a sharing, supportive community. Sharing empowers us and our community. It helps us to become better teachers.

Creativity in the classroom
So in the spirit of the sharing teaching community, here are two ideas that have worked well for us, and which we’d like to share with you.

1 Show and imagine
This is a motivating, personalised activity where the students practise speaking fluency. It’s based on a traditional ‘show and tell’ activity – but with a twist. You can also use it as a lead-in or lead-out to a lesson where the learners focus on describing objects. It can be used with any level from strong elementary (A1+) upwards.
Stage 1: Ask the students to draw a picture of something that is really important or significant to them. Preferably, this should be an inanimate object, but if you feel it necessary, they can include a pet. Set a time limit for the drawing, eg one minute. It doesn’t need to be a work of art!

Stage 2: Put the students into pairs, A and B. Ask them to look at each other’s drawings but to say nothing. Tell them that, in a moment, they will have to imagine that their partner’s object is theirs, not their partner’s, and they have to make up and tell their partner the following information (display it on a board or screen):

Imagine your partner’s object is yours. Use your imagination to say:
1 what it is;
2 where and how you got it;
3 how long you’ve had it;
4 what it’s made of (if it’s an object);
5 why you like it;
6 an anecdote, story, incident or memory related to it;
7 any future plans you have related to it;
8 anything else you like.

Adapt the prompts to suit the level of your students.

Stage 3: Ask Student A to talk about ‘their’ object (ie the one in Student B’s drawing). Tell Student B that they should look interested, nod their head, smile and use other back-channelling strategies (showing that they’re following with interest) such as saying Uh-huh, Really? Wow! etc. Explain that they can also ask questions, eg Where exactly was that? When Student A has finished, Student B tells them the real information. Then they swap: Student B now talks about Student A’s object and then compares it with the real information.

Stage 4: Ask the pairs to report back to the class on any surprising information. Carry out a language review related to what the students actually said.

2 I have ... a poem
The students write poems based on memorable, personal experiences, using sensory language. The activity can be used in a lesson focusing on the present perfect for experience. We first learnt of this poem and technique from Scott Thornbury.

Stage 1: Tell the students that you are going to read a poem (they don’t see the text). Ask them to listen for information about the senses (things the writer sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes).

Read out the following poem:
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 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.

Stage 2: Ask the students to recall any of the images they remember from the text. Take feedback and hand out the poem or display it on a screen. Ask them if they enjoyed the poem, which particular images were powerful for them and why.

Stage 3: Give the students the following sentence prompts and ask them to write their own poems.
I have seen ...
I have tasted ...
I have heard ...
I have done ...
I have touched ...
I have remembered ...
I have smelled ...

Stage 4: Allow the students time to work on their draft poems. They can ask you for help with any language they need. As they work, go around and help to edit the poems so that they are not full of mistakes. Get the students to share their poems with each other.

References:
Immordino-Yang, M H and Damasio, A. ‘We feel, therefore we learn: the relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education’ Mind, Brain, and Education 1 (1) 2007
Kaufman, J and Beghetto, R. ‘Beyond big and little: the four C model of creativity’ Review of General Psychology 13 (1) 2009

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Reflections on teaching, reflections on learning

By Matt Done

Like all of you, I had to find creative ways to fill my time after we went into lockdown for a second time. I realised that being at home for long periods of time offered the perfect opportunity to improve my elementary-level Spanish, so I grabbed some pens and notebooks and got to work. However, this was to be language learning with a twist, as I decided that while I learned, I would also reflect on the process from the points of view of a learner and teacher. What follows, in no particular order, is a selection of some of these reflections.

Task repetition is a good thing

One thing I did to improve my Spanish was book lots of online conversation classes with several different tutors. Since most were also introductory lessons, I was having much the same conversations and answering the same questions again and again. ‘Why did you move to Malta? What’s it like there? What’s the coronavirus situation?’ While the first couple of times I made an absolute hash of responding, by the third or fourth classes, I managed to answer the questions much more fluently and accurately. That’s probably because, having already thought about the content of the answers in the earlier conversations, I was now able to devote more attention towards the language itself. We often worry about repeating things in class, but it might actually be useful to get our students to have the same conversations again and again (with different partners!). By repeating conversations, learners will get better at them – particularly if we provide them with feedback between attempts.

Input is crucial

I quickly realised that one thing I needed was input, and lots of it. I listened to whatever Spanish I could, in videos, in podcasts, and on TV. I read too – articles, football match reports, and TV subtitles. All this input gave me an idea of how the language worked – what words were most frequent, and what patterns occurred regularly. In the input, I also came across previously learned vocabulary and grammar, so it served as an opportunity to recycle language and embed it more deeply in my brain. Teachers are often advised to keep their TTT (teacher talking time) to a minimum, but good quality TTT is one way that students can get this essential exposure to language. Therefore, teacher-provided input such as stories and anecdotes are surely something to be encouraged, not frowned upon. Additionally, it’s probably a good idea to make sure that our materials contain plenty of input in the form of listening or reading activities, and that our learners are getting more input outside of class.

Engaged students learn more

I used a lot of resources for this project, some of which were great, while others were drab. Similarly, some of my classes were lively, while others had me glancing at the time. Needless to say, when I felt emotionally and cognitively engaged, the language I was studying came to life, and it became more meaningful and memorable. Although I still learned from the lesser lessons and resources, I struggled to derive as much benefit from them. This made me realise how important it is for teachers to ensure that their classes are engaging and involving. I don’t think this means packing lessons full of games or technology. Rather, lessons can be made engaging by using relevant topics, increasing the frequency of learning opportunities, and taking a genuine interest in students. Speaking of which...

Students notice if you care

As I mentioned, I did quite a few online lessons during lockdown. What surprised me was that some of the teachers didn’t ask me much about myself, and seemed more concerned with correcting my mistakes or getting through exercises. While I still learned things from these teachers, I found that the ones I got most from were those who took an interest in me as a person. This, I realised, mattered more to me than how qualified the teacher was, whether she was a native speaker, or how many years of experience she had. It might be easy to get caught up in lesson plans, level tests and the like, but I really believe that engaging with our students on a human level should be a key priority.
Confusion is a natural part of learning

While watching an episode of a Spanish TV series, I noticed an unfamiliar grammatical form in the subtitles, so I paused the show and did a bit of research on this new piece of language. What I found confused me no end, as it didn’t seem to relate to the context in which I had observed it. Our learners too will suffer moments of confusion and frustration at not understanding something, but the reality is that sometimes it’s necessary to accept that we’re not quite ready to take on a particular piece of language. This ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ shouldn’t be seen as giving up. Rather, it’s acknowledging that language learning is a gradual and sometimes messy process. While as teachers we’re obviously going to try and help our learners understand tricky bits of language, I think we also need to be sympathetic to the struggles they will inevitably face, and reassure them that while certain things might not make sense to them right now, they will at some point.

Vocabulary trumps grammar

During many of my online conversations, I’d be halfway through a sentence when I’d get stuck, and start snapping my fingers in the hope it would jog my memory. Most of the time, what caused me to hesitate mid-sentence was not a lack of grammar, but a lack of vocabulary. There were of course times when I got stuck on which grammatical form I should use, but on these occasions, I was usually able to keep going, albeit with a lack of accuracy. This experience has strengthened my conviction that vocabulary drives communication more than grammar, and that it will help students if we make vocabulary a priority in our classes. This can be challenging at times, because books still tend to focus most attention on grammar. But it might be worth remembering Wilkins’ famous quote: “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.”

Once is never enough

In my first few days of learning Spanish, I didn’t make much of an effort to record and revise the new language I was encountering. This meant that I completely forgot most of it, unless it was an extremely common word or structure which popped up frequently in videos or texts. Encountering a piece of language once is simply not enough to learn it - you need to see that language several times before it starts to embed itself. Therefore, giving our learners repeated encounters with the language we teach is crucial. Lots of Input in the form of reading and listening will take care of this to an extent, but this should also be accompanied by deliberate revision activities. Also, for those of us using a course book, it’s vital that the book recycles the language it teaches.

Teachers are learners too

Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned from this Spanish project is that teaching is also a constant learning process. Trying to learn another language is a great way for us to see things from the perspective of our students and thus be more empathic, but also, it offers a valuable insight into the learning process itself, and the part we play in that process as teachers.

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I would imagine the concept ‘over-Zoomed’ is self-explanatory to all who have spent weeks teaching online through Zoom, Teams, or similar. The ‘shortcuts’ I refer to I would define as ‘tidbits of language that cover a lot of ground (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.) and can be taught as (mostly) set phrases’. In other words, using functional language to examine an issue, which learners might have, not in detail, but as ready-to-use phrases. I often employ such ‘shortcuts’ in my lessons and lesson plans. These include various linkers, fillers, set phrases, reactions, idiomatic expressions, etc.

My guiding principle is that if something is not right in terms of basic communication, I should take a few minutes to teach my students how to improve. Take, for instance, a Pre-Intermediate group that needs to work on a task in groups of four. Most of them would rely on body language, gestures, and using first names to essentially ‘order’ a person to say something or to simply go next. Once it becomes apparent that your students do not know how to generate and utilize such functional language, you would step in, and, knowing your group, teach something along the lines of:

- *Do you want to go first?*
- *Who wants to go first?*
- *X, do you want to start?*
- *X, would you like to begin?*

Depending on your students, you could even go with *d’you for do you, wanna for want to*, etc.

A rule of thumb would be to teach them how to react in a more natural way when presented with such a question. In the example above, you are teaching them the function of turn taking and the expected reactions. Most native speakers and proficient users, such as myself, often take these set phrases for granted, likely because we use them daily and without a second thought. Your students, on the other hand, may not have the foggiest about what constitutes a predictable reaction in English. To wit, an expected answer to *Do you mind if I opened the window?* is along the lines of *Not at all!* or *Go ahead! even *Sure.*

To me, natural reactions are the most suitable way to boost a lesson. A lesson type I often use is something I have nicknamed the *Grapevine*. First, a warmer with open-ended questions containing lexis of choice, which the students answer and share. Then, we work towards the Reported Speech du jour, using textbook materials or grammar exercises created with the target vocabulary. After the gap-fill or the sentence-rewrite exercise, I elicit natural reactions to the information presented in the sentences. From there, we discuss punctuation, or what the same phrase is in the students’ native languages, all of which I would have planned for.

In short, functional language remains an untapped potential that should find its place in your lesson plan. That way, you have more to offer your students from the page or unit you are using.

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My session was somewhat based on recent personal classroom experiences, especially while teaching a Listening Skills elective class over a span of about 5 months, as well as literature and other source material I have used to inspire me while lesson planning.

The session objectives were as follows:
1. identify different listening task types;
2. focused on pre-listening and during-listening strategies;
3. describe step-by-step strategies for learners to deal with different task types;
4. extend/adapt the points covered by using different online tools in class and for self-study.

Are we really teaching 'listening'?  
A listener may need any of the following to understand spoken language:

Intrinsic factors might include:
- Ability to recognise phonemes/sounds and the effect of elision, assimilation and intrusion in natural speech / suprasegmentals e.g. word stress/intonation; familiarity with the specific accent of the speaker(s);
- adequate knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures;
- ability to identify speech acts, and elements of discourse;
- general familiarity with the topic being discussed and/or prior (personal) experience of the subject;
- an open mindset/positive attitudes (i.e. Krashen’s low 'affective filter'), and/or internal motivational factors;
- familiarity with the specific task types and relevant strategies to employ;
- frequent/consistent/extensive training/practice.

Extrinsic factors might include: clear voice/recording; a calm atmosphere without distractions/disruptive noises; adequate acoustics; external motivational factors.

Skills training vs. assessment
Field (1998) highlighted the tendency teachers have to favour the product approach, rather than focusing on the internal processes learners go through while listening (the process approach).
We discussed how the participants used listening tasks in the classroom: Do you teach listening skills i.e. help learners use strategies to complete listening tasks, which can be replicated in future activities, or even in real life situations?

Task types and approaches
We can imagine different task types on a continuum, with gist listening on one end and listening for detail on the other. By the same token, one can use top-down approaches e.g. activating schemata, and bottom up approaches i.e. focusing on smaller units of language with these task types. When listening for gist, a top-down approach might be more beneficial, while bottom-up approaches may be better suited for tasks focusing on detail.

Strategies
Wilson (2008) grouped listening strategies into three main categories: cognitive (i.e. what one must do to do the task), meta-cognitive (i.e. having some awareness of the process by which to get a better result), and socio-affective (i.e. interacting with other speakers/learners, and exploring attitudes towards learning).
Task procedures

Gist listening task

This task was set after the topic of health issues was firmly established as the central theme of the unit.

Step 1 (pre-listening): I asked the learners to think about the last time they made or received a call where someone had reported feeling unwell, and to tell a partner. [Socio-affective/activating schemata]

Step 2 (pre-listening): I asked my class to focus on the question words in the task:

Why?
What (health problems)?
[meta-cognitive]

Step 3 (while listening): Learners looked for patterns/topic words in each conversation. To avoid focusing on detail, I asked them to write freely while listening but then edit their answer to no more than 8 words for each question. [cognitive]

Step 4: (post-listening) They worked in pairs, discussing what they had understood, and made inferences, and proposed their ideas to the class. Answers were elicited and situations were constructed step by step as a class. [cognitive/meta-cognitive]

Step 5: (conclusion) Learners were given a handout of the transcript and/or listened again to confirm. They were encouraged to summarize the main points of the content in their own words at the end. [cognitive]

Gap-fill task type

Using keywords

This task was preceded by a free discussion about the topic: work-life balance.

Step 1 (pre-listening): I asked the learners to choose no more than 4 keywords for each statement, giving preference to:

'content' (as opposed to functional) words e.g. nouns/verbs/adjectives/adverbs;
negative forms - verbs/never/no etc.;
numbers/figures/references to quantity if any;
keywords/terms that were different from the other items in the list. [cognitive/meta-cognitive]

Step 1.2 (pre-listening): I asked them to expand on Step 1 by adding synonyms of some of the chosen keywords. Benefit: Higher-level processing/checking meaning. [cognitive]

Online tools:
https://www.voicetube.com
https://www.listen-and-write.com/
Text-to-speech tool: https://www.naturalreaders.com/
oneonline/
Ted Talks www.ted.com;
TED ED https://ed.ted.com/ for ready-to-use video-based lessons;

Further reading:

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Mindfulness in action in the adult ELT classroom
By Corinne Vella

Worry, stress, anxiety... We live in a society which has normalized all of these negative emotions. And with Covid-19 and its repercussions, the strains, trials and tribulations of life are on the rise. It is easy to bring our own worries, stress and anxiety to the classroom. Mindfulness offers each and every one of us a reprieve, a way to learn how to let go of negative emotions and find joy in our everyday lives.

There are various ways that we can tap into Mindfulness in our ELT setting – in the classroom with our students, with our peers and colleagues, as well as on an individual level. In this article I would like to briefly outline the 3 activities that we discussed at length during the June MATEFL seminar.

A Mindful Pause

We tend to teach in blocks of 90 minutes, but we all know that attention spans tend to wane before that. This activity is simple. At the start of the lesson we give a small bell to one of our students, asking them to ring it at any point during the lesson when they feel they would benefit from a short pause. A concern some teachers may have is that this would be seen as a waste of precious class time, so it is important to keep this pause short so it is effective, maximum 2 minutes. Students may choose to stretch their legs, or join you in some simple stretching exercises, focusing on the neck and shoulders which tend to gather a fair bit of tension when we sit for long stretches of time. This is not a mobile phone break, but an opportunity to refocus so that we can come back to the lesson with renewed vigour.

Quotes – Reflection & Discussion

An activity that can be used as a warmer, a lead in or a lead out, this might be a softer approach to bringing Mindfulness into the classroom. Select a life-affirming or inspirational quote, and invite learners to quieten their minds and thoughts, to follow their breath so as to bring themselves to the present moment, and as they dwell in this cocoon of peace and awareness, read the quote and ask them to reflect on it for a few moments. A quote such as ‘Gratitude turns what we have into enough’ by Aesop could then lead into vocabulary work and discussions of various types. Check out Louie Schwartzberg’s short film ‘Gratitude’ or simply google Gratitude ELT lesson plans for complementary materials. In a world which is stressed, tired and afraid, it is uplifting to explore more positive emotions.

Meditation

There are plenty of guided meditation scripts or videos that can be used with our learners or even with our peers. Meditation centres us, grounds us and brings us to the present moment, exactly how and where we want our students to be at 9 o’clock on any given day. You could choose to start or end the class with a short guided meditation for its own sake, or you can use this as a lead in into other discussions. A body scan can be an opportunity to revise body parts and introduce higher level vocabulary such as ‘scalp’, ‘finger tips’, and ‘soles of the feet’. Either way, it is a listening exercise which can foster positive feelings and help learners to tune in. But why limit it to learners? Some schools already start teachers’ meetings with a short meditation!

A valid concern might be how learners will perceive such activities. I prefer to focus on the benefits of meditation, knowing that we are fostering kindness, gratitude, joy or quieting the mind from its incessant thinking. Knowing what the end results can be can is reason enough to give it a shot. At the end of the day, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I believe we should always enter into an open dialogue with our learners, and I have met learners from various ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds who have already incorporated meditation into their own lives. Here’s a link to a General English lesson on Mindfulness that you may wish to try out in class.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/magazine/mindfulness

Activities as adapted from Greater Good in Education

Mindfully creating positive relationships with students:


https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/quotes-and-sayings-a-contemplative-practice/

Corinne Vella

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Interview with Jean Sciberras
By Bob Bejdak

Jean Sciberras was honoured with the ELT Career Service Award in last year’s annual conference. This was only the second time that this award was presented. Jean, a teacher, Dos, and now freelance CELTA Teacher Trainer was selected not only for the 35 year long career in EFL but especially for paving the way for hundreds of other teachers. She believes in professionalism and passionately and generously shares her experience and knowledge with hundreds of other teachers having the sole aim of motivating them to be the best version of their teaching selves.

Can you tell us two or three educators who have inspired you in the past?

My father was a teacher and I feel that ultimately I owe my education, love of reading, professional development to him. He encouraged us not to end and supported all the choices I made even though he didn’t always agree with them.

Another person I feel grateful to was my Celta trainer way back in 1985 at IH London. That course was an eye opener, so different to the way we were teaching then, so student-centred, so exciting.

Can you tell us two or three books you’ve read which have inspired you professionally?

It would have to be books by Penny Ur and Jeremy Harmer, two authors I had the fortune to meet. Grammar Practice Activities, Discussions that work, Five-minute Activities all by Penny Ur, and The Practice of English Language Teaching, How to Teach English by Jeremy Harmer.

How has teaching EFL changed, do you think, since the time you started teaching?

When I started teaching there were hardly any course books at all so we all had to be creative and bring in our personality to class. With the very many good course books around, lessons around the world have become very similar, teachers perhaps a bit lazier. After all why re-invent the wheel? Nowadays with internet a lot of authentic material can be yours at the click of a mouse. In the past you had to buy magazines and newspapers and hope to find something interesting.

In my days, CELTA and DELTA were hardly recognised and since I was one of the first to have those qualifications I was not really valued. A manager in one of the schools where I had spent 12 years teaching had simply remarked that what they needed was someone in front of 15 students, regardless of the qualifications. There were no TEFL CERT courses then and this is definitely a very positive development. Nowadays CELTA has become the minimum qualification for those taking teaching seriously.

In what ways have teacher roles, learners, content, resources syllabi etc changed if at all?

Whereas before the teacher was the sage on stage now the teacher is more the scribe on the side. Of course you still find T-centred lessons unfortunately but the most important factor now, I believe is the student’s autonomy. The learners are given the responsibility for their own learning but teachers need to create the right conditions for that learning to take place.

What tips would you give to teachers starting out in their career today?

If they believe teaching is their chosen profession then definitely a CELTA. I would encourage them to teach abroad for a while. I had spent 2 years teaching in Perugia myself, 1990/1992 and it was probably one of the best decisions of my life: ‘Away from home and friends to find out what the heart really wants, what the heart really desires’ James Joyce. It was then difficult to work abroad since we were not members of the EU, but my qualifications made it possible.

What challenges did you face when you started teaching online?

Naturally tasks had to be planned differently, instead of Find Someone Who, I started doing a Find Something Which for example. Once you get the hang of it, online teaching really is no different to F2F. I have just finished teaching two CELTAs online. The bond created amongst the trainees was stronger than that in a F2F. I believe this course beats the F2F in that the activities and tasks are suitable for both. Trainees are now equipped to teach F2F and online.
What new techniques and strategies have you learned while teaching online?

Multi-tasking is one of them. While observing a trainee teaching, I would have on the monitor the grid with students, the PPP being shared and also the Observation Feedback Form I’d be writing. Naturally the joy of Break Out Rooms, Chat, Padlet for instant writing and so much more. Covid was a shock to all of us but it certainly taught me how resilient, creative, and determined I could be.

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The below table from the NSO shows the popularity of different types of course in English language schools in Malta in 2020. The table also shows the nationalities of students who booked these courses.

By far the most popular type of language course in 2020 was general English, with a total of 9,782 students selecting this option. Of this number, the vast majority (over 1,400) were German, with Italian, Spanish, and Brazilian students accounting for the other most common nationalities.

Intensive English was the next most popular course, with just under 4,300 students, while 1,504 students booked other English courses.

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<th>Country of citizenship</th>
<th>Type of course</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>General English: Standard</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General English: Small</td>
<td>424</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensive English</td>
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<td></td>
<td>English specific purposes</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Some courses were held remotely in 2020.
2. Includes Business English.
3. Includes Exam Preparation Courses, One-to-One lessons and other courses.
4. Includes unspecified country of citizenship.