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Welcome to our Academic Journal



“Together, we are building a platform that will inspire and support educators around the world.”

The launch of this journal is more than just a publication; it's a celebration of collaboration and a shared commitment to advancing the EFL community.

We are delighted to present the first edition of our academic journal, a milestone we are thrilled to share with you. This journal represents a significant step in our commitment to fostering knowledge and collaboration within the EFL community.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the sponsors and educational institutions that have supported this endeavour. Your contributions, whether through insightful articles or generous sponsorship, have been invaluable in bringing this journal to life.

This initiative is just the beginning. We are eager to continue building on this foundation, creating a platform that supports and nurtures the EFL ecosystem around the world. Your ongoing support and participation are vital as we strive to make a lasting impact in the field of language education.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Together, we can achieve great things.

Jonathan Swindell
Chief Executive Officer

Words from our editor

Welcome to the launch of the **Quality English Academic Journal**. This is a new undertaking for Quality English and is designed to celebrate the beating heart of Quality English members, what happens in their classrooms, and how this teaching and learning role sets them aside as something very special indeed in the global ELT sector.

We decided for this first issue to invite contributions around the theme of learner engagement. While engagement is notoriously difficult to pin down as a concept (in answer to the question 'What is student engagement?', Barkley (2010: 4) said 'Well, the answer is that it means different things to different people.'), its presence in language school classrooms is almost viscerally felt by learners and teachers alike. This collection of short answers may not explicitly define engagement, but it certainly illustrates the depth of breadth of academic prowess found in QE staffrooms and the likelihood that students at QE schools will be truly engaged in their learning.



NEIL HARRIS

The articles are taken from **10 Quality English members**, eight in the UK and two in Ireland, plus one from our corporate partner, Pearson. The range of reference and scope is impressive, from the whole school approach advocated by Ian Brangan (**The Linguaviva Centre**, Dublin) and echoed by Jane Zohoungbogbo and Kate Smook (**Millfield School**, Millfield) to the more granular approach taken by Neil Harris (**CELT**, Cardiff), who looks at how mediation activities can encourage learner engagement and Francesca Berlen (**St Clare's**, Oxford), who argues for the use of fairy tales in adult and EAP classes for the same purpose. If Quality English members rejoice in their own distinct character, but are unified under the banner of quality, then each of the articles has a different take on learner engagement, which for many learners is a key aspect of a quality education. Giedrė Balčytė (**Academic Camp**, UK and Canada) considers how a CLIL methodology can generate learner engagement and Simon Dunton (**Wimbledon School of English**, London) underpins a rationale for the use of real-world tasks to engage learners by referring to the work of Mercer and Dörnyei, leading researchers in the field. In a similar vein, Nadine Early (**ATC Language Schools**) explores the relationship between project-based learning and how it leverages integrative motivation and the L2 motivational self-esteem. Also of note in the selection of articles is the complementary approach the contributors take to tried and tested classroom management techniques and their role in developing engagement. Jayne Bowra (**Languages United**, Bath) reminds us of the importance of pair and group work in the physical classroom while Jim Pearson (**LILA***, Liverpool) challenges us to rethink what we do and how we do it when engaging with learners for whom digital technologies have always been a part of their lives: our job is to work with the 'new normal' post pandemic by making simple but profound changes in school policies. Technology is not surprisingly a common thread: Deidre Slevin (**Cork English College**, Cork) looks at gains in engagement which are possible when teachers and learners develop their digital literacy and in particular their Attentional Literacy and Charlotte Guest (**Pearson**) considers the role of gamification to educate and excite the learner.

Above all else, we hope that this overview of the articles presented here entices you to read on and when you reach the end, you have been truly engaged as you take with us a deeper dive into the topic of learner engagement. We anticipate that the journal will be published annually and welcome your comments and future contributions. Please reach out to us at info@quality-english.com

Language through learning, learning through language: Engaging CLIL in Academic Summer Camps

GIEDRĖ BALČYTYTĖ

Introduction

Academic Camp delivers vibrant summer experiences for children aged 7-17 across five distinctive locations, blending academic challenges with leisure pursuits. At the core of these programmes is the key philosophy of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which fuses subject learning with language acquisition. This approach fosters natural language usage within academic settings, enhancing student engagement – a vital element in the relaxed yet enriching environment of a summer camp.

CLIL: framework and rationale

Content and Language Integrated Learning integrates the learning of content with a non-native language, enhancing linguistic abilities and deepening content understanding. Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) did much to popularise the concept of CLIL and outlined how the approach integrates an additional language into content learning, thereby enriching both educational and linguistic outcomes. More than that, CLIL's theoretical foundations include Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which highlights the role of language in cognitive development and emphasizes learning within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). Today, CLIL concept has evolved into a highly regarded educational theory on effective language acquisition and overall cognitive development. It is widely agreed in the literature that one of the best ways for students to acquire language is in immersive learning environments where language is not taught as a subject isolated from context but as a vehicle for broader educational objectives facilitating deeper understanding and retention (Ikeda et al., 2021; Coyle et al., 2023). In engaging immersion, language learning becomes not just about learning vocabulary and grammar rules; it's about using the language actively to achieve specific subject goals, solve problems, think critically and creatively as well as communicating meaningfully with others.

Bridging first and foreign language acquisition

The success of CLIL can be attributed to its ability to replicate the natural way we acquire our first language – through interactive, meaningful communication.

A fundamental hypothesis of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory is the acquisition vs. learning hypothesis. It distinguishes between "learning", a conscious process, and "acquiring", which is analogous to how children naturally learn their mother tongue. Krashen believes that mirroring the effortless way in which children absorb their native language through exposure to rich and varied language use in contextual and meaningful interactions is key (Marsh, 2012). Learning becomes subconscious and spontaneous, with the focus on communication rather than the mechanical aspects of language structure. Krashen's theory also emphasizes the importance of receiving "input" that is slightly beyond the current level of the learner's understanding yet still comprehensible through contextual clues. This not only facilitates linguistic fluency but also nurtures an intuitive understanding of language patterns.

Academic success of the 4 Cs of CLIL

An integral aspect of CLIL that enhances its academic impact is the incorporation of the 4 C's: content, communication, cognition, and culture. As articulated by Coyle et al. (2023), CLIL is not simply about learning new content through a foreign language, but it is about using language as a tool to learn both content and culture, while simultaneously developing communication skills and cognitive abilities. The role of content transcends the traditional boundaries of subject matter delivery. Students are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively engaging with and constructing their own knowledge. By solving real-world problems and conducting experiments, for example, students deepen their understanding of the subject matter in a contextual and applied way, using the target language effectively. Related to the idea of expression is communication, which is pivotal in CLIL settings as it underscores the functional use of language within the learning process. Students are encouraged to articulate their thoughts clearly and interact with complex concepts through the target language, developing confidence, enhancing their ability to convey information, negotiating meaning and collaborating effectively.

The emphasis on communication also supports metalinguistic awareness, enabling learners to reflect on how language can be manipulated to achieve different purposes, thus deepening their overall communicative competence.

Engaging learning: the CLIL experience at Academic Camp

At Academic Camp, the application of CLIL is not just a theoretical model but a vibrant, lived experience that transforms the way students interact with both language and content. By embedding the principles of CLIL into daily activities, the camp ensures that learning is both meaningful and enjoyable.

Each session at Academic Camp is designed to merge language learning with thematic content, making each lesson applicable to real-world scenarios. To enhance engagement, Academic Camp utilizes active learning strategies such as project-based tasks in English, where students collaborate to create presentations on historical events, or scientific experiments. These projects require students to apply their language skills in a team setting, enhancing their communication abilities while fostering a sense of accomplishment.

Academic Camp challenges students cognitively by incorporating problem-solving activities that require critical thinking in English. For example, math puzzles or logic games conducted in English push students to process and articulate complex ideas in a second language, which sharpens both their linguistic and cognitive skills. The camp environment promotes social interaction in a multicultural setting, where students from various backgrounds use English as a common language to build relationships. Activities like group sports, arts and crafts, and cultural day tours and nights encourage students to express themselves and share their cultures through English, enhancing their emotional engagement and cultural understanding.

Teachers at Academic Camp are trained to act as facilitators rather than traditional instructors. They guide discussions, provide feedback, and encourage students to explore topics that interest them, which heightens engagement and motivation. Students take ownership of their learning, increasing their enthusiasm and commitment to the language and content.

Finally, by fostering a thorough grasp of how language operates in various academic settings, Academic Camp equips students with the skills to succeed in a range of learning environments beyond their time at the camp. This focus on the enduring relevance of CLIL principles reflects the camp's dedication to supporting students' holistic development and ensuring the sustainability of their language proficiency and academic skills over time.

Conclusions

Through practical implementations, Academic Camp successfully utilizes CLIL to create a dynamic learning environment where students are not only learning English but are also actively engaging with educational content in a way that is both meaningful and enjoyable. Students leave the camp not just with improved language skills but with lasting knowledge and fond memories of their learning experience.

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Using project-based learning to foster student engagement

NADINE EARLY

In today's dynamic educational landscape, language teachers are constantly seeking innovative approaches to engage learners, enhance language acquisition and encourage the development of communicative competence. Educators can harness an array of digital tools and technologies to facilitate this, with no shortage of potentially transformative tools available for language teaching and learning specifically. Yet these resources are of little value if not underpinned by a methodology that taps into our learners' integrative motivation - that is, the motivation to learn which arises from a positive attitude toward the target language community.

Project-based Learning (PBL) emerges as one such powerful methodology, which pivots around learner engagement. It is an approach centred around inquiry and authentic, real-world experiences. It promotes learning across a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills and competences, integrating disciplines. It encourages learners to explore complex problems and develop holistic solutions. At its core, PBL nurtures essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Importantly, PBL provides teachers and learners with a robust framework for exploring a target language community.

By introducing projects into classroom practice, teachers can give learners opportunities to engage with language learning on a deeper level. Project work allows those learners who tend to struggle and feel excluded in a traditional language classroom to have a voice and contribute to the project work in a meaningful way. It provides space for a variety of skills to shine, such as innovation, creativity, and empathy. Learners with these strengths are motivated to contribute and, with appropriate support, will engage with the target language more readily than in a traditional language classroom. Support will be needed to help learners to mediate target language texts and to scaffold them in their written and spoken output, not just for the final end-product, but throughout the process, where group interaction takes place.

To aim for maximum learner engagement, we must ensure that a number of core elements are met when designing a project:

Authenticity:

The projects we suggest should be authentic and involve real-world contexts. Learners should identify with the project topic, tasks and outcomes. They should feel that the project is relevant to their lives, and their future. This resonates with Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), a theory which posits that individuals are motivated to learn a second language (L2) when they have a clear vision of their *ideal self* in the future (Dörnyei, 2009). This is the learners' own image of what they want to be in the future, and if this image involves seeing themselves as competent L2 speakers who can engage with others on topics of shared interest through a common language, then we are on the right path to nurturing their integrative motivation.

A good driving question:

The project should start with an engaging, open-ended question that needs to be answered, or a problem that needs to be solved. The driving question might be philosophical and encourage critical thinking, such as *How do you determine a person's self-worth?* Or it might present a problem that learners have to research and find a solution to, such as *How can we take effective action on climate change and make a positive difference as individuals / a school / a community?*

Agency:

Learners must have a sense of ownership and control over the project, from selecting the topic, to creating the driving question and to goal setting (both project management goals and learning goals). They must also have choice over the format of the end-product - how they will showcase their learning, including what tools they will use. As Fried-Booth (2002) notes:

(It) is the route to achieving this end-product that makes project work so worthwhile. The route to the end-product brings opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together ... on a task which they have *defined for themselves* and which has not been externally imposed. (Emphasis added by the author).

Language log

Built into the project should be a shared 'space' where learners log new language that they have identified as being useful for their project. This might be topic-relevant vocabulary that they meet during their research, or it might be functional structures and phrases that they seek out to help them communicate about the project. This shared space might be a wall poster or it might be a digital resource which allows them to add links to online dictionary definitions, where they can listen to the pronunciation of vocabulary items and explore collocation and usage. The key here is that learners have agency in deciding what language they need and what target language items they want to log.

Reflection, feedback and revision

Reflection is an important part of the process. Elements of this may be done in the L1. Learners can reflect on what they have learned in relation to the questions they asked, and what further questions have come out of that process. They can reflect on the quality of their work and consider what they need to do to improve it. They should engage in structured peer-review activities, where they critique and provide feedback to each other on their work. This might be on the processes they are using to conduct their research and inquiry, or it might be on the draft products they are developing along the way, building up to the final end product for presentation. When considering the quality of their project output, and that of others, the evaluation process should be scaffolded to help them consider not just language, but organisation, content and concepts too. For written output, Hedge (2005) provides lots of useful activities for reviewing and revising work.

Public product

Where possible, the end-product of the project is publicly displayed. It is presented to an authentic audience - ideally an audience from beyond the classroom. This public process encourages learners to improve the quality of their work and, in particular, to pay attention to accuracy in their L2 output - to be, as Willis & Willis (2007) put it, on their *best linguistic behaviour*, using *prestige language*.

Honouring the concept of authenticity means also that the end product of the project should, where feasible, utilise the tools, techniques and technologies used out there - in the 'real' world - beyond the classroom. Groups can produce podcasts using Podbean or Soundtrap; infographics using Canva; digital picture books using My Storybook or Book Creator; interactive tours using Google My Maps; websites using Google Sites or Wix. Alternatively, learners can host their own TED Talks event.

Nowadays, identifying with a target language community involves moving beyond the concept of community and culture within national borders. As such, it can be reenvisioned for our learners as identifying with an affinity group, and participating in the discourse of that group, with ideas, solutions, and creative input, through a shared lingua franca. This is the spark that is needed to ignite motivation and engagement with language learning.

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Attention ELT!

DEIRDRE SLEVIN

To engage learners, we first need to gain their attention, and this can prove especially challenging given the proliferation of digital devices and their inherent distractions. In today’s tech-saturated world, Mavridi’s concept of Attentional Literacy (AL) (Mavridi, 2020) offers to teach students management of digital distractions, which aids lifelong learning. Furthermore, lessons on digital literacy keep students engaged because the content is relevant and meets learners’ needs.

Context

At Cork English College, students sometimes need to use their digital devices in class for classroom purposes, and we noticed the tension between using technology for learning while at the same time, potentially losing our students’ attention to technology. Therefore, I created and piloted a lesson (for levels B1 upwards) designed to address teachers’ concerns around the use of digital devices in lessons for non-classroom purposes (NCP). This proved successful and was further adapted as CPD for teaching staff, thereby both supporting teachers and learners.

Pedagogy

The lesson is loosely task-based as well as digital-literacies driven (Pegrum, 2022) with a socio-constructivist underpinning. This translates as a collaborative effort to understand the issue, to work out solutions, and to determine the best way to maintain focus.

Stages

1. Introduction

To introduce the topic, we ask students to discuss the apps they use and to rank them in order of importance (Fig. 1). This task, adapted from *Activities for task-based learning* (Anderson and McCutcheon, 2019) allows for personalization, thereby engaging students, and it also activates learners’ schemata on the topic of technology, specifically vocabulary related to mobile devices and apps.

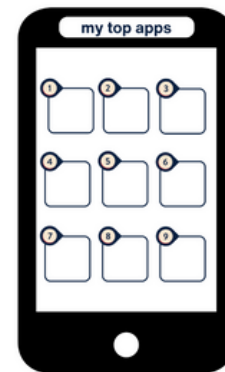


Fig. 1

Once the students have ranked the apps they use, we can ask them to “pair and share”, or, as part of a pyramid activity, ask them to collectively agree on their top 3 apps. Some scaffolding for this activity would be to ask the students to think about the following questions:

- How often do you use these apps?
- What do you use them for?

The following could be added for early finishers and/or Business English students or:

- What are the best features of your favourite apps?
- How could you improve the apps?

More visual learners may respond well to a word cloud visualization of apps used by their class – see Figure 2 for an example of this.



Fig. 2

Outcome

Usually, students will come up with some great ideas around the positive features of apps and mobile technology, and the teacher can monitor and support students' emergent language needs, as well as note whether any students mention FOMO (fear or missing out) or multi-tasking. The latter will link nicely with the next activity.

2. Raising awareness:

In our experience, (adult) students seem to be primed to receive lessons on attentional literacy (Pegrum, 2022). Nevertheless, some may have entrenched views, maintaining that they can use their mobile devices *and* pay attention to their learning in class.

We address this by asking students to enter into a class experiment to debunk the myth of multitasking. The following two-part exercise is best demonstrated in advance by the teacher.

- Firstly, students take a blank sheet of paper, then they write the words "multitasking is a thief" on the page, and next the numbers 1-20 underneath. They note the time it takes them to do this.
- Next, they take another blank sheet of paper and this time, they write the 1st letter of the line 'multitasking is a thief', and then the 1st digit of the 1-20 line; then the 2nd letter of the line, followed by the 2nd digit and so on, alternately between lines until completion (figure 3). Again, students note the time they finish.

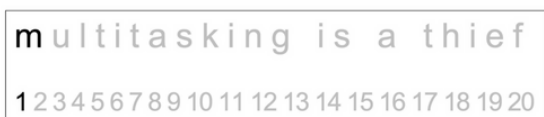


Fig. 3

As a follow-up activity, students can brainstorm what the expression 'multitasking is a thief' means, such as the act of multitasking steals our time/attention/focus. Having elicited fear of missing out earlier in the lesson, we can facilitate a discussion on how the use of devices for non-classroom purposes can actually distract fellow students too.

Ultimately, by generating interest in the topic and raising students' awareness of the impact of multitasking, students realize the importance of (re)gaining agency over their learning environment.

Rationale

Students may say they feel stressed, under pressure or frustrated completing the second part of the above 'multitasking is a thief' exercise. We can draw parallels between this and how students' attention is divided once they start using their phones in class for NCP. Without AL, digital disarray can lead to "continuous partial attention" (Stone, 2009) or "fragmented attention" (Dobelli, 2020), resulting in the use of multitasking as a coping strategy.

Class contract

Once the students themselves have established the negative impact of mobile devices on their learning, we can ask students to create a class contract governing their in-class device usage. The contract records the outcome of the discussion on what comprises acceptable classroom behaviour. In terms of general classroom management, restricting mobile phones early on in a course can be beneficial later when reference can be made back to the conditions initially agreed on. Finally, in addition to addressing emergent language needs, the lesson also provides distributed practice of modals and functional exponents for negotiation.

This collaborative activity also facilitates meaningful student communication with a negotiated outcome. By agreeing what guidelines they think appropriate, we are fostering learner autonomy as well as a growth mindset. Additionally, the class agreement mitigates the negative impact of mobile devices per se, which have essentially extended our attentional choices beyond our attentional capacity (Levy, 2016).

Summary:

Raising awareness and developing skills for balanced engagement is at the core of this lesson on AL, which integrates strategies for managing digital distraction into English language programmes by offering classroom activities along with relevant theoretical insights. By starting a conversation and raising awareness, learners are empowered to search for solutions, and take on the responsibility for what they pay attention to and how to focus on their learning. Furthermore, by informing ourselves as ELT teachers and teacher trainers on the subject, we can better support our learners in life-long, and life-wide learning.

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Leveraging mediation activities for learner engagement

NEIL HARRIS

A scenario surely familiar to students and staff in language schools in English-speaking countries is that of a group of learners who want to make use of their free time to explore the local area. The learners are from different countries and all share English as a common language, although some have a higher level than others. Ideas for the event are sourced from school staff, visitor guides and the Internet, and perhaps even AI, a plan is made, and the students go off to explore. They are all invested in the making the event as enjoyable as possible; in other words, they are all engaged in achieving their desired outcome. On the face of it, this is a very common and indeed unremarkable event; in reality, complex skills are at play, all of which can provide us with ideas for valuable classroom learning. Mediation is one of these skills and used well it can, I will argue, create the environment for high levels of learner engagement.

How can learner engagement be encouraged?

Before we look at what mediation is in the context of ELT, it is important to consider what we mean by engagement and to try to identify some of the features of an engaging learning experience. Engagement is commonly agreed to involve learner active participation and involvement; like its close relation, motivation, it is seen as key to successful language learning. Academics disagree on the optimum conditions for successful language learning and teaching but task-based learning and massive amounts of language input have both emerged as likely factors. If these can be combined with an evidence-based set of principles for learner engagement, then hopefully the conditions have been met for active learner participation and involvement. In an attempt to create such a list of principles, Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) developed the following table of criteria:

- The contexts of learner engagement
- The facilitative learner mindset
- Teacher-student rapport
- Positive classroom dynamics and culture
- Initiating engagement with learning tasks
- Sustaining engagement on learning tasks

Of note is the assertion by the authors that “we do not think for a moment that anyone should (or could) apply all of the methods in the table. Quality is more important than quantity”. They go on to consider three central themes: (i) the power of positive emotions, (ii) empowering learners as partners in their education and (iii) active participation. Engagement does not come out of thin air or the coincidental happy combination of a great teacher and a great class: rather, steps can be taken by teachers to design engaging learning by attending to these relatively straightforward principles. We now need to consider what mediation is and its fit with these ideas.

What is mediation and why does it matter?

In order to understand mediation, Kiddle’s (2019) definition is a good starting point: “mediation is when we use language to explain something to someone who doesn’t fully understand it without our help”. The role of the mediator, the person doing the explaining, is to act as a kind of bridge to the other person who doesn’t fully understand. Thinking back to the example of the student visit to the local area, there may be multiple reasons why mediation is helpful. The learners may have different English language levels and a learner with a higher level may need to explain the language of the visitor guide or an Internet site to a learner whose level is much lower. Similarly, a newly arrived learner is likely to benefit from the understanding of a learner who has been staying in the area for longer to make sense of a map or a public transport system. In both cases, there are three core elements at play: a more knowledgeable other (MKO), a student who can benefit from the MKO’s greater understanding, and a text (a map, a tourist guide, an Internet site), understanding of which is being made possible by the act of mediation.

Immediately we can see a number of educational forces at play. Vygotskian co-construction of knowledge combines with negotiation of meaning within the context of an authentic task (organising a trip) which uses authentic material (material about the place being visited). We can now add mediation to this list. While some teachers perhaps remain less familiar with the term mediation itself, it is a common communicative act and has in fact existed in ELT for many years (IELTS Writing Task 1 and many Cambridge Upper Main Suite speaking exams involves acts of mediation). Can-do descriptors for mediation in the CEFR are relatively recent and this greater visibility has brought the term to much greater prominence in coursebooks and in mediation-related activities in our classrooms.

Mediation and learner engagement

The tasks described previously in this article hint at the reasons why mediation activities can encourage learner engagement. In the case of the group of learners who are interested in exploring the local area in their free time, the very act of mediation has a clear purpose (agreeing what the group members want to do) and a desired outcome (a great day out) and is a clear example of a communicative task which requires negotiation of meaning. When this real-world activity is translated into a classroom one, requiring the students to use authentic materials to organise a day out, the only real difference is the element of artifice (unless the students do then go on the trip). The combination of task-based learning and the authenticity of task and text create favourable classroom conditions for successful language learning. Likewise, the IELTS Writing Task 1, which for many learners may be associated with exam preparation course fatigue (and therefore negative backwash), is in fact very much an authentic task of textual mediation when seen through the optic of the requirements of many businesses which require summaries for business reporting purposes.

As such, the ability to reframe this writing task not as an exercise in gatekeeping (IELTS is, after all, used for such purposes in academic and visa application contexts) but as a valuable tool in the world of work is likely to be beneficial in terms of developing learner integrative and extrinsic motivation. Where motivation is high, learner engagement generally follows. I would argue, furthermore, that mediation also encourages engagement in its relationship with a number of Mercer and Dörnyei's points. Where a mediation task connects the learners personally, a positive classroom dynamic culture is created, in which learners interdepend for a successful task outcome. When organising the group event, for which groupwork and cooperation are necessary for a successful outcome, the group of individual learners become a team with its own sense of we and us (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Likewise, the reframing of the IELTS Task 1 writing task as a real-world business task chimes with the importance of contexts for learner engagement, and in particular Principle 2 of connecting language learning in class to life beyond the classroom.

In conclusion, mediation tasks coincide with a number of principles underpinning successful learner engagement. When these are aligned with task-based language teaching and authenticity of text and task, we set the scene not just for learner engagement but successful language teaching and learning.

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The pivotal role of pair work and group work in student engagement

JAYNE BOWRA

When people think of learning and teaching, they often imagine students sitting in rows, listening to a teacher who stands in front of them. However, the modern EFL classroom has a long relationship with student-centred practices and this article explores the significance of pair work and group work in enhancing student engagement within the EFL classroom.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs through collaboration and dialogue with others. Pair work and group work align with this theory by promoting the idea of 'activating students as instructional resources for one another' (William, 2009). This activates collaborative and cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching and peer assessment by providing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful interactions, negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge. There are, of course, other advantages. Black et al (2003) observed that "peers explaining things to each other revealed important insights about why this is such a powerful process. Students often communicated complex ideas in a language that was different from what the teacher would have used, but appeared more easily assimilated by other students."

It is absolutely normal that some students will be shyer, less confident, weaker at English or less willing to speak, for any number of reasons. It is part of the teacher's job to encourage them and part of this is ensuring they have the space to participate. In pair work and group work, students can practise language together, study a text or take part in information-gap activities. The amount of speaking time that any one student gets in class time is also dramatically increased and autonomous work and interaction are promoted. Think-Pair-Share is a powerful tool that should probably be a core component of every teacher's repertoire. It is a visible thinking routine that gives every student the opportunity to rehearse their ideas, practise explaining and to engage in productive talk. "Language learning is a process that involves lots of attempts and errors along the way, and so it is very important to give learners opportunities to try out the language, to feel it on their tongue, to experiment with putting words together, to make attempts that turn out to be unsuccessful or only partially successful and not to aim all the time, unrealistically, only for supposedly perfect sentences." (Scrivener, 2012)

If factors such as over-crowding or fixed furniture can be overcome, organising pair work and group work is relatively quick and easy to organise. However, a reluctance to employ this approach is often linked to behaviour issues. We all know that when students work together, they can become distracted or distract others. "Control is a big issue in the classroom and teachers, quite rightly, worry about this." (Black et al., 2003). Pair work and group work can sometimes be resisted by the students themselves. Reasons include a belief that teacher-fronted presentation is 'better', that there is no value in working with another student who is either much stronger or weaker or even that they don't get on with their allocated partner.

So why should we be promoting students as learning resources for one another? The simplest argument for pair and group work is that it allows more learner talk and this, in turn, is likely to lead to significantly higher involvement and engagement. William and Leahy (2015) explain various reasons why peer collaboration and cooperation in the classroom is so important: "It is worth noting that there are two rather distinct purposes that people express for cooperative and collaborative learning. The first is that because adults are required to work together in their jobs and communities, schools should prepare young people to work in this way. The second is that having students work together can produce greater learning of subject matter than would be possible by having students work individually or in competition with their peers." In my own multilingual classroom teaching context, pair work and group work promotes cultural awareness and intercultural competence, as students interact with classmates from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

While pair work and group work undoubtedly offer substantial benefits to the learner, their effectiveness hinges on careful planning and implementation. To maximise student engagement, teachers can employ various strategies:

1. Clear instructions: provide clear, concise instructions for tasks and activities, ensuring that students understand their roles and responsibilities within the pair or group.
2. Balanced grouping: consider students' language proficiency levels, learning preferences, and personalities when forming pairs or groups to ensure balanced and effective collaboration.
3. Scaffolded support: offer scaffolding and support as needed, providing students with the necessary tools and resources to successfully complete tasks and achieve learning objectives.
4. Monitor and feedback: monitor pair and group interactions, offering feedback and guidance to redirect discussions, clarify misunderstandings, and reinforce learning outcomes.
5. Reflective practice: encourage students to reflect on their collaborative experiences, identifying strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement in their communication and teamwork skills.

By fostering the 21st century skills of collaboration, communication and critical thinking through pair work and group work, these cooperative learning strategies empower students to take an active role in their language learning journey. Ultimately, pair work and group work contribute to the holistic development of language learners, preparing them for success in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world.

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Engaging students in a post-pandemic world of scrolling apps and screen-based interaction.

JIM PEARSON

How do you keep the attention of a 17-year-old who's used to swiping up, down, left and right every 35 seconds? How do you keep the attention of someone whose childhood was interrupted by a global pandemic gluing them to their screens for a solid 2 years? How do you keep the attention of students who are training for an IELTS exam someone else is making them take? These are just a few of the issues facing us, and most other language schools today.

It's easy to blame our students. "They just can't focus!". "They're so rude!". "How dare they complain about describing a graph that shows the decline of paper sales in the UK from 1979 to present!". But, is it possible we are the issue, not them?

The COVID pandemic and ensuing lockdown affected me, a middle-aged man in full-time employment. I struggled with working from home, where there were just so many distractions, from the fridge and the myriad of different sandwiches I could make from its contents, to the cat, the TV and anything else, but not my uncomfortable dining room table and chair, newly morphed into my workspace. It affected me, so why was I so blissfully ignorant about the effects it was having on our youth? Why did I not foresee how making our kids study, communicate and live on their laptops and tablets was going to form a habit they would struggle to break when they were expected to return to a resemblance of normality?

Social media has a lot to answer for. TikTok grew in numbers exponentially from its introduction in 2017. By May 2020, there were 6 million active monthly users in the UK. According to WIRED (Jesutofunmi, 2022), a quarter of the most viewed videos on TikTok fell within the optimal recommended length of 21 to 34 seconds. The platform has been training users to reduce their attention span to next to nothing. When we get bored, we swipe and move on. Topic changed, content changed, attention regained, but with the option to swipe and repeat within seconds. How do schools compete with a world training our kids' brains to switch off in a matter of seconds? Well, as the old adage goes, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Months were wasted fighting the losing battle of trying to engage students, when the reality was, we were trying to undo months and years of brain training that did the opposite. It was time to work with them, not against them. 90-minutes is a long time to ask anyone to focus and research tells us that the average adult has an attention span of minutes, not hours. Without a break, a change of topic, a stretch of the legs or something to refresh our mind, it'll wander. Enter, the *Pomodoro Technique*. Created in the late 1980s, the Pomodoro method, named after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer, suggests a 25-minute bout of work, followed by a 5-minute break...and repeat. The idea is simple, after 25 minutes, we're reaching information saturation, and after that time, the amount of information we can process and store is drastically reduced. Could we replicate this in the classroom? For years, the 90-minute class – 15-minute break – 90-minute class has been the norm. But who does that suit? The school, the teachers, the Director of Studies who puts the weekly timetables together. In fact, it suits everyone except the students, the people we're there to help, the focus of the business. Since adopting a 60-minute class – 10-minute break – 60-minute class, attention span is back on track. It's not an issue fixed, but it's a start. It's time to look at timetabling from a student's point of view, working to their needs, not ours.

Discussion with the newly formed student representative group told us that lessons were too formulaic. Again, we had fallen into the trap of, if it isn't broken, don't fix it. But it was broken, or at least fracturing, and without in-depth exploration of how the students really feel, we'd become too settled in our old ways. Surprisingly, the students didn't want to turn to page 16, read the text and answer the questions – and compare answers. At least not all the time.



And so, project classes were born. Classes of different levels were brought together for photography competitions, our version of *Humans of New York* – the aptly renamed, *Humans of Liverpool*. For those of you who aren't aware of *Humans of New York*, do check out Brandon Stanton's Instagram page for a fascinating insight into the residents and visitors of New York in all their beautiful diversity. Elementary students worked with Advanced, pre-intermediate with upper-intermediate, and work together they did. They got out of their seats, into the city, into the real world talking to real people. Homework isn't a chore when you are asked to photograph something special instead of completing a gap fill task with the simple or continuous aspect. Homework's interesting and engaging when you are interviewing real people with real stories.

A complete phone ban in the classroom seemed like punishment. 'There'll be a revolution, they warned'. 'We're expected not to use our phones for 90 minutes at a time, they exclaimed!' "What if there's a dire emergency?", they questioned. But the plunge was taken. It was a bold move and one that required every teacher in every class to get behind it. Special makeshift "phone pockets" (shoe pouches to tidy up your closet) were hung in every classroom...we meant business. Monday morning came around, the students diligently put their phones away, and the lessons started. And...nobody complained. The students engaged. The odd one was seen "scrolling" their wallet or staring at their empty hands, but the majority engaged. Within a day or two, it was the norm. Students arrived, put their phone in the pouches and actually spoke to each other in the lessons. After 25 minutes, they got their pomodoro break, to check for those dire emergencies, to get their fix, to scroll something that responds to touch rather than a wallet or empty hands. Was the system actually working? Honestly, it appeared, and continues to appear to be working and most importantly, there was no revolution. I was not ousted, and for now, my job is safe.

There's no easy fix to managing student engagement. The systems we have put in place are working for our current cohort, but what is to say that will be true for next year's students? When a school works for its staff and not its students, there will always be a danger of losing those we're supposed to cater for. By responding to their needs and interests plus a dash of tough love, we can help them engage, help them to make the most of their time with us. When we become fixed in our policies, we're no longer putting our students at the forefront. So maybe it's us that need to adapt instead of expecting our students to adapt to us. Just a thought.

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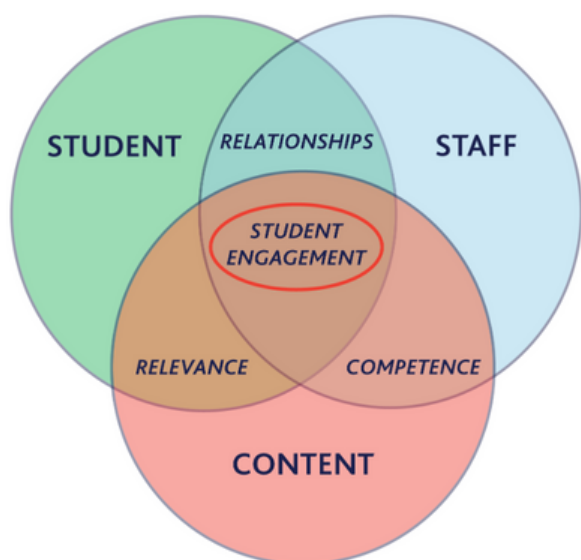
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Are you listening at the back? Student engagement in a summer school setting.

JANE ZOHOUNGBOGBO AND KATE SMOOK

True student engagement starts long before the students arrive and should be a key factor in course planning, staff recruitment and training. Failure to employ staff who are motivated and motivating with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, skills, and interests will only guarantee disappointment for your staff and students. Whilst environment has an important role to play once the students have arrived, the reality is that it's the people that we recruit that make the biggest impact. This approach may cause additional challenges for senior managers as they must implement a range of management styles reflecting the diversity of the staff body. It's not a top-down approach and should be interwoven, as suggested by Corso et al (2013. American Secondary Education) (See Figure 1). Although their original model was related only to academic studies, we believe that in a summer school setting all departments have shared responsibility for creating an environment engaging their colleagues and students. Therefore, we have amended the original 'Teacher' heading in the diagram to 'Staff':



Thoughtful course planning and implementation that promote inclusion at every level by offering choice and understanding that the one-size-fits-all approach is not sufficient or appropriate is key to both staff and student engagement. As part of this, it is essential to have a strong base structure and routine that allows for flexibility and adaptability. Students need to feel secure quickly in their summer school setting to allow for confidence to build and for learning, in all its forms, to take place. Without these, everyday small problems that are likely to occur can seem insurmountable to both staff and students. This in turn leads to students becoming disengaged and it can be difficult to regain their trust.

How does this approach translate into practice? Our current Top 5 for helping to ensure student engagement is as follows:

1. Staff Trials Days: we believe that it's important to meet as many potential staff in person as possible. One way to do this is to hold interactive group interviews with candidates who have successfully reached the second stage of the recruitment process. This is a much more holistic approach to recruitment and gives you the opportunity to get to know candidates in settings which complement formal interviews. Equally it gives the candidates a chance to get to know you and decide whether your setting is the right one for them.

2. Induction: we believe that a comprehensive induction that doesn't just teach policy and procedure but builds strong teams and professional relationships is key. It should offer chances for all staff to develop a level of understanding about their role, how the organization works and the people they will be working with. Alongside the formal mandatory sessions, there should be time allowed for Q and A and an opportunity to develop soft skills. This helps ensure that staff are prepared for the first student arrivals because they feel secure in their roles and can support and engage the students from the vital first point of contact.



3. Safeguarding|: by putting safeguarding at the forefront of everything we do and not just by paying lip service to it, we strive to ensure an environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This is especially important for those who may arrive with us without feeling that way.

4. Process Syllabus: rather than following a set course book or curriculum we believe that a more individual approach should be taken where students and teachers are used to create the learning pathway. Underpinning this is the core belief that learning is a process and teaching something does not mean that it is learnt or understood. Selecting materials from a variety of sources, including the staff and students themselves, can create a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued, listened to and are more likely to be motivated to learn.

5. Feedback: be prepared to listen to or read things that may challenge your way of thinking. Feedback from students and staff is equally valuable. Encouraging students to reflect on their learning and share their feedback can give you an insight into the summer school experience from their perspective, which is equally as important as the staff and management perspectives. Staff feedback can take many forms including post-observation, appraisals, exit interviews and informal conversations. Using feedback to support and guide staff development and continuous review helps create a program that allows students and staff to flourish and achieve their learning goals. Managers need to have an open-door policy and be visible and approachable, allowing staff and students to feel listened to and to give managers a chance to prevent potential problems which could impact on the learning experience.

Our conclusion is that to maximize student engagement, we must consider a multi-faceted approach that allows for holistic learning across all aspects of summer school, not just in academic settings. The key factor is your staff body who, if you have created the right environment, will still be engaged, and learning alongside the students and your management team. Allowing for any elements to be overlooked impacts the potential for student and staff dis-engagement or non-engagement in the learning process, which means that no one is listening at the back!

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Using gamification in teaching: Engage, educate and excite

CHARLOTTE GUEST

At its core, gamification is the strategic use of game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, encourage learning and solve problems. In an educational setting, it transforms the learning experience by making it more interactive and rewarding, akin to the way games captivate and hold the interest of players. Essentially, gamification leverages the innate human desire for competition and achievement to foster a more stimulating and immersive learning environment. This strategy not only makes education more appealing to students but also encourages them to take an active role in their own learning, fostering a positive and stimulating educational atmosphere.

Why is gamification important in education?

Educators today stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation. With the advent of technology and digital tools, teaching and assessment methods are rapidly evolving. And as we continue to explore the vast potential of these trends, it's essential to gather insights from experts in the field. The significance of gamification and play in the learning process is well-documented. According to Johnson et al. (2011), gamification techniques encourage the desire for socializing, learning, mastery, competition, achievement, status, and self-expression. They discuss how these techniques help to motivate students to learn and improve their cognitive and social skills, leading to a more engaging and effective educational experience. This perspective aligns with the constructivist theory of learning, which theorizes that learners construct knowledge best through active engagement and experiences. Considering this, gamification in education is not merely about adding game elements to teaching but about redesigning the learning experience to foster active participation and immersion, thereby deepening comprehension and making learning more memorable.

By treating education as a form of play, learners of all ages find it easier to confront challenges, manage failures and celebrate successes, echoing the natural learning process experienced outside the classroom. This approach not only makes learning more enjoyable but also mirrors the rewards-based systems they're likely to encounter in the real world.

How gamified learning can increase students' skills

The effectiveness of gamified learning in augmenting and training students' skills cannot be overstated. By integrating game mechanics into the educational process, learners are encouraged to take an active role in their education, leading to a higher level of engagement and participation.

This, in turn, often results in a deeper understanding of the subject matter and a significant improvement in problem-solving skills. Gamification stimulates learners' curiosity and motivates them to progress through learning milestones, effectively turning the acquisition of new skills into an enjoyable and rewarding process.

Helping students engage with their learning

Research conducted by Hamari et al (2014) further underscores the positive impact of gamification on student engagement. In their study, they analysed the outcomes of gamification across different settings and found that it can improve participation and engagement levels (depending on the right setting and execution). The study concluded that when implemented thoughtfully, gamification could significantly enhance motivation and engagement, thereby promoting better learning outcomes.

Gamification, when aligned with educational goals and balanced well with traditional teaching methods, can serve as a powerful tool for educators to facilitate more effective learning experiences.

The dynamic and interactive nature of gamified learning supports a diverse range of learning styles, making it an inclusive method of active learning that can cater to the unique needs of individual learners. Ultimately, by making learning more interactive and enjoyable, gamification not only supports the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge but also cultivates critical soft skills such as teamwork, communication and time management, which are invaluable beyond the classroom.



Enhances retention and recall

Gamification further stands out in its ability to enhance memory retention and recall among students. The engaging nature of game-based learning activities encourages repetition and reinforcement, key factors in consolidating new information. According to one study (Wouters & van Oostendorp, 2013), students who engaged in gamified learning (with instructed support) showed higher levels of recall of knowledge.

The interactive and engaging components of gamified elements help with encoding information more effectively, making it easier for students to retrieve information when needed. This aspect of gamification, therefore, not only makes learning more enjoyable but also more effective, particularly in fostering durable learning that extends beyond the classroom.

Best practices for incorporating gamification in education

Implementing gamification in teaching requires more than just adding points and badges to educational activities. To ensure it enriches the learning experience effectively, educators should adhere to a set of best practices.

It's crucial to align game mechanics with learning objectives. This means that each element of gamification should have a clear educational purpose, for example, whether it's to reinforce knowledge, encourage teamwork, or develop problem-solving skills.

Use meaningful rewards

Offering meaningful rewards is vital. Beyond physical rewards, intrinsic motivators such as unlocking new content or gaining access to more challenging levels can significantly enhance engagement and motivation.

The importance of personalization

Finally, personalization plays a key role in successful gamification. Allowing learners to choose their learning paths or avatars and personalizing rewards and challenges to their level of skill can make the learning experience more relevant and engaging.

Ways to implement gamification in your teaching

Here are some practical ways to apply gamification in your classroom:

- 1. Enhance motivation with game-based elements:** implementing point-scoring systems, leaderboards and badges can make learning more fun and motivate students to strive for better results.
- 2. Encourage positive competition:** create challenges and contests among students to encourage them to engage more deeply with the material. Ensure the competition stays friendly and constructive.
- 3. Interactive learning modules:** use technology to create gamified lessons that are interactive and adaptive.
- 4. Storytelling projects:** adopt the role of AI in fostering creativity, allowing students to construct stories using AI-enabled writing tools. This not only helps with language skills but also encourages creativity and imagination.
- 5. Progression-based learning:** design a curriculum that allows students to unlock new levels or topics as they progress, similar to how they would advance in a game. This provides a clear sense of progression and achievement.
- 6. Real-life rewards:** incentivize learning goals with real-life rewards, which can range from extra credit to classroom privileges. Doing so can encourage learners to take their 'gaming' achievements seriously.
- 7. Feedback loops:** like AI, gamification thrives on feedback. Provide recurring feedback to help students understand where they're excelling and what they need to improve.

With these strategies in mind, you can begin to integrate more gamification elements into your teaching practice. Just as artificial intelligence is paving new ways for engaging learners, gamification presents endless possibilities for creating captivating and effective educational experiences.

Education is no longer just about conveying information; it's about actively engaging students in a way that makes learning irresistible. By using gamification, you can transform your classroom into an arena where each lesson is an adventure, each task a challenge to be overcome, and learning itself a victory to be celebrated.

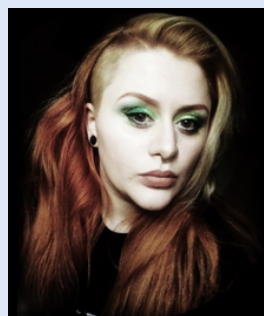


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Away with the fairies: Using fairytales in the English language classroom

FRANCESCA BERLEN

When studying for my DELTA, I chose to base my receptive skills language skills assignment (LSA) on using fairytales to develop critical reading skills in young learners, something that I presented on at the 2018 International House Young Learner Conference and have been using in various ways ever since. Now I find myself working with adult learners and teaching academic English alongside general English, where students tend to be less than enchanted when faced with the list of academic skills they need to learn. Therefore, I was keen to see if I could apply the same theme with older learners and sprinkle some magic into what *can* be quite dry lesson content.

For weaker students, fairytales are an excellent source of authentic texts and meet the recommendation of Fenner & Newby (2006) that teachers select reading texts which have a balance of familiar and challenging features. As fairytales share common themes across cultures, students are more likely to be familiar with their content and able to relate them to stories in their L1, meaning they already have a grasp of the lesson content. The fact that students can relate stories from their own cultures also builds confidence, creates an inclusive environment, and gives us the opportunity to celebrate our students' multiculturalism.

We've all had students in our class who feel they have peaked in terms of English learning and have 'seen it all', making it tricky to motivate them. It might seem counterintuitive to provide them with reading material that they have almost certainly seen before, but using these stories as a basis for creativity can push students to think outside the box and challenge them in different ways. Fenner & Newby (2006:86) state that use of literature with young learner '*offers the opportunity to encourage free and creative use of a foreign language*' and this applies to adult learners too. These students find enjoyment in having fun with the story and the language, and making someone laugh is one measure of the success of a learning activity. Using humour in the classroom not only creates a relaxed atmosphere but can also '*facilitate learning and increase recall*' (Chabeli, 2008:8). It also allows students to show understanding of different shades of meaning, as required at the higher levels of the CEFR.

Fairytales for language development

By carefully designing our activities, we can either explicitly teach language, or disguise practice of language structures which students 'already know' (and therefore refuse to study) but secretly need a little more work on. Fairytales make use of narrative tenses, which are always worth revisiting to address fossilised errors with irregular verbs or the ever-tricky past perfect. We can also practise conditionals when speculating on alternative endings – 'what would happen if Cinderella had not left the ball at midnight?'

We can have our students summarise stories with the inclusion of specific structures, such as negative adverbials with inversion, or participle clauses. Students can practise the use of the passive voice and reported speech through creating a news report on fairytale 'incidents' – '3 Bears Squatter Turns Out to Be Local Golden Girl, 'Mysterious Breadcrumb Trail Spotted in Forest', 'Latest Act Of Terrorism: Wolf Destroys Two Local Houses, Terrifying Locals'. There is not really any limit to what language structures can be noticed or practised using fairytales.

As fairytales are also full of rich descriptive language, students can be provided with descriptions from different stories and match them to their title, moving on to creating their own descriptions in place of ones provided by the teacher. Fairytale characters also provide an appropriate target for practising a range of descriptive character adjectives: grotesque (The Beast), arrogant (Gaston) and irascible (Grumpy).

Fairytales for academic skills development

In terms of academic English, students need to develop a range of skills, many of which are also present in English curricula. Rather than yawning their way through an academic English textbook, these skills can be addressed in a playful way through a fairytale theme.

To get students used to evaluating different sources and considering writer bias, they can begin by comparing similar stories from different cultures or different adaptations of a story, then research and discuss what influences these variations. Cinderella, for example, originates in China and has 500 different versions in Europe alone (Northrup, 2000), with the story content varying greatly across contexts.

As well as appreciating different styles of texts at higher levels, students also need to shift to reading and using more formal language. Where students have little knowledge, the teacher can rewrite a familiar fairytale using more academic language and have students 'translate' it. Once the language is more familiar, students can be challenged to rewrite a fairytale of their choice to include vocabulary from the academic word list (Academic Word List (AWL), 2021). As an example: 'Little Red's grandmother **resided** in small dwelling in the forest. After regular **surveillance** the **resourceful** wolf deduced that her granddaughter **invariably** visited her on Sundays'. These tasks are much more accessible when using a familiar tale than they might be using a different kind of text.

Another key skill students need to develop is understanding the content of journal articles and studies. In order to familiarise students with the importance of abstracts, students can write story-themed ones, such as 'The best materials to build a wolf-proof dwelling'. Writing up a study on 'How the Prince Identified Cinderella', describing the methods and results, acquaints students with the different sections of a study and can make reading academic texts a little less intimidating.

Debates and presentations are of course integral to an academic programme (and are present in most English programmes). Debating 'fun' topics can help students to practise set phrases and debate/presentation structures in an informal way, as well as helping students to get used to speaking in front of others in a low-pressure environment. Often issues arising from fairytales can be a good basis for this, as in the example Are fairytales anti-feminist? Bernabei (2019) even suggests using fairytales as a springboard for a variety of social topics like socioeconomic differences and injustice. Given the wide range of fairytales, the majority of which at their core address shared issues, there is a topic out there to engage most students.

Many students struggle with paragraphing and use of punctuation, even at higher levels. Providing them with fairytale texts from which these features have been removed can provide good practice of understanding where they would be appropriately used, and knowledge of the story itself can help this seem more intuitive. If classes are particularly creative, the learners might like to invent their own fairytale stories, which can include familiar story characters or not.

Conclusion

There are endless ways in which fairytales can be used in both the English and Academic English classroom, with both younger and adult learners. Students tend to respond very well to this nostalgic revisitation of their childhood stories, as well as delving into the grittier topics which can stem from them. By carefully selecting and adapting our activities, we can ensure that our students are far from 'away with the fairies'.

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Engagement by design in a language teaching organisation

IAN BRANGAN

Transformative experiences

An educational trip abroad can be a life changing experience and requires a sizeable investment of time and money. Educational tourism providers therefore need to review constantly how they are engaging with learners in meaningful ways and strive to make that investment worthwhile. As Hiver et al. (2020) state, it is incumbent on the Language Teaching Organisation (LTO) to have 'checks and balances in place at each step of the learning journey to fully monitor the learners' engagement and achievement while on their language course'. This article suggests ways in which this can be achieved.

Mission

In the study abroad sector we straddle two sectors, education and travel. Our mission must be to create the ideal conditions for our students to fully achieve their learning goals and to optimise their experience abroad.

Personalised instruction

The ratio of staff to students is a key factor in whether learners are going to have optimal conditions at the school to achieve their goals. The number of learners in a class influences the amount of time a student will have for practising and learning opportunities. The teacher learner relationship is key to learner engagement and 'creating a rhythm of continuous improvement with students as partners in the learning process is the ultimate goal' (Williams, 2020)

Challenges to effective learning

Nobody would deny that there are many challenges to effective learning in the study abroad context. There is the culture shock and dislocation a student can experience abroad. The language barrier itself is an obvious challenge. These factors can lead to disengagement and result in the student not recognising the potentially transformative experiences available.

A framework for language learning

Linked to the calibre of teaching is the degree to which the institution has thought through the context in which it is providing language education and fulfilling the learner's goals.

In the context of the CEFR, educators have been increasingly asked to think of the learner as a social agent in a plurilingual culture where diversity is the norm and learning language is the goal. In the European context the goal is interdependence and cooperation. In the language class a crucial ingredient that defines the quality of the learning experience is the mix of nationalities in the classroom.

Collaborative activities

More than 20 years after the CEFR was first published, we are accountable for providing real-world scenarios for the learners to communicate in and real-world tasks for them to collaborate on. The language classroom is a fertile ground for learning and sharing from other areas of their education be that the humanities or sciences.

Assessment of learning

Close monitoring of linguistic progress is a well-established benchmark of quality. Having a well-defined study plan is crucial. Without a plan, learning a language becomes a bit like running a marathon without any signs indicating the stages of the race. The learner will struggle to maintain momentum and motivation.

Nowadays, communicative language learning & teaching (CLT) is so firmly embedded in language teaching that the idea of placing a student in class without an oral interview is highly undesirable. This initial interview allows us to mould student expectations.

Students should take part in a fully interactive orientation and have a chance to meet the key members of staff with whom they will be interacting. They can make sure the learner is fully aware of the learning opportunities while at the school. In longer term programs, a mid-course and end-of-course opportunity to give feedback is crucial for students. Varying the way that feedback is gathered is key.

Appointing someone to be responsible for feedback analysis and response is every bit as important as having a GDPR / Data Protection coordinator.

Experiential learning

Another crucial element of student engagement is emotional involvement in the learning process. This is reinforced by Fisher (2017): "the teacher will identify the passion points of a learner and make sure that the learners are genuinely engaged in communicative tasks around issues and topics that matter to and motivate them."

Ultimately, involving learners emotionally works best when the materials allow the learner to create their own product which reflects their ideas, opinions and desires.

Using technology

Learner-generated materials are more motivating when they have an audience. This can be achieved by devising projects in class where students co-publish a product. In this way there is a record of the learning and it reaches an audience and receives feedback.

A further use of technology is artificial intelligence (AI), which can now generate authentic language which students and teachers can use in and outside the classroom. Platforms for the use of AI in language education such as www.twee.com will accelerate the opportunities for students to practise and as such should be welcomed by educators.

The local environment

It is crucial for LTOs to exploit their local environment fully. Students should have an opportunity on the course to meet locals through elements of the course itself or on the educational trips and activities.

Our courses themselves should be linked to the local environment by getting the learners to go out into the community to create products in English. The LTO is itself a provider of employment in the local community and as such is ideally placed to develop rewarding relationships with local businesses to develop its programmes.

Fostering intercultural connections

It cannot be overstated how important a multi-stranded social program is in relation to a course of study. The activities on a social program should, as much as possible, cater for all tastes. The most important aspect of all is to highlight the quality of the local amenities and facilities whether that be exploring the local coastline or attending wine-tasting evenings.

Achievement should be celebrated

The end of the course is a crucial touch point when achievement should be celebrated. This involves celebrating both the academic achievement and the connections and friendships that have been fostered on the course. Where this aspect of the course is handled professionally, learners are left with memories in the form of photos, cards, certificates and reports which attest to the value of the experience. Attaining an external validation of language improvement can also significantly enhance value for students.

Conclusion

Our job as language educators in the study abroad sector is to prioritise the unique perspectives and experiences of learners and to continue to drive student engagement through a better understanding of their needs.

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Using real-world tasks to increase learner engagement

SIMON DUNTON

The importance of learner engagement

It has long been known that learner engagement is an essential element of successful language learning. Haycraft tells us that engaged learners, “bursting to say something in English which interests them passionately” (1978, 7) is a sign of the ideal classroom. More recent researchers explain that engagement is an indicator of motivation, an essential factor in language acquisition (Mishan & Timmis, 2015) and have highlighted the link between engagement and general well-being (Resnik & Mercer, 2024).

This being so, our job as language teachers is, “to provide materials which are likely to stimulate intrinsic interest” (Mishan & Timmis, 2015, 11). In other words, we should create, adapt and make use of learning materials that aim to grab our learners’ attention and maximise their engagement for as long as possible as they develop and make use of their language knowledge and skills (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Designing activities

Mercer and Dörnyei’s (2020) CLARA principles are an excellent guide for teachers designing and adapting engaging activities. They argue these must be:

- Challenging
- Learner-centred
- Active
- Real-world relevant
- Autonomy-rich

Additionally, I propose activities and tasks should integrate 21st century skills such as collaboration, creativity, problem solving, global citizenship and critical thinking, as well as the use of technology.

With these principles in mind, I set out below two tried and tested classroom ideas. While these have been carried out in the context of multilingual learners studying in a London-based school, they are also adaptable to various teaching and learning contexts.

Classroom activities

Organising a cinema trip

This learner-centred activity follows a task-based approach in which small groups of learners must arrange a cinema trip to take place within the next week. They must decide where, when and what to watch, based on information found on the websites of three real cinemas. Each cinema has been chosen for a specific reason, for example one is cheap but far from the school, one shows older films, and one is close to the school but much more expensive. Learners must arrange this trip around their real lives, taking account for example of their work and study schedules and where they live in the city and personal preferences such as film genre, willingness to travel and the ticket price, which increases both the challenge and the authenticity of the task.

While working collaboratively, learners make use of a number of integrated skills, including organisation (deciding who will check which sites), reading (skimming and scanning for information on the websites), and speaking and listening (making arrangements). It is also rich in opportunities for emergent language as learners attempt to negotiate and persuade one another (“Why don’t we see...?” / “I think you’d really like...”) and reject ideas (“Nah. I’ve already seen that” / “I’m afraid that’s too far for me to travel”). Additionally, learners engage with each other’s real lives as they reveal reasons they can’t go to a certain film at a certain time (“I can’t go because I work on Fridays” / “Actually, I’m leaving this weekend”) This helps build peer rapport, another essential element in the successful language learning classroom. This task proves itself to be engaging not only because of the level of interest and communication that takes place in the class, but also because, on several occasions, learners have actually gone to the film chosen together in real life. Adaptations to the task include arranging a meal in a real restaurant, including what each person would order, a trip to a museum or gallery or a day trip to another place of interest.

Green issues outside the classroom

This longer-term, ongoing activity is relevant to real-world issues as learners find and take photos of examples of green-related issues they notice outside the classroom. They then post these photos and write a brief description of what they have found and why they think this is relevant to the local environment onto a closed online discussion board such as Padlet. Learners respond to each other's posts, either using a reaction button (a 'like/dislike') or by leaving questions and comments underneath the original post. There are no limits as to how many times or how much a learner can post or respond, other than the rule that it must be at least once each. This gives learners the autonomy to engage with those posts that most interest them and to keep returning to the task for however long it runs (typically a week in a context where learners come to class every day). Example posts have included litter on the streets, electric car chargers attached to streetlamps, foxes on the streets, open freezer sections in supermarkets, pay as you go bikes and recycling bins outside houses. Learners have the autonomy to choose to post anything they think is relevant, including both problems and solutions and innovations.

With little prompting, students engage freely with one another on the Padlet, asking questions and relating what they saw to their own experiences, both around the school and their place of origin. This provides a wealth of emergent language to work with both on the Padlet (for example by correcting and/or upgrading language in responses) and in classroom discussion as the project was summarised. This can be adapted to focus on interesting samples of English outside the classroom (posters, signs, t-shirt slogans), examples of nature in the city (both animal and plant) and different forms of transport.

Conclusion

What is outlined above are just two examples of how tasks can be designed through extended CLARA principles to bring the real world into the classroom and adapted to meet local contexts. These not only encourage learners to produce language that can be explored and developed by the teacher at appropriate moments, but are also dynamic, learner-centred, freer activities that allow for great learner autonomy. They are, therefore, engaging, enjoyable and have great value to the learners.

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