NOTES FOR TEACHERS

***English Teaching Forum* supports the teaching of English around the world through the exchange of innovative, practical ideas. Below is a description of each section of the journal, along with suggestions about how to use it.**

ARTICLES provide practical, innovative ideas for teaching English, based on current theory.

READER'S GUIDE corresponds to the articles in each issue and can guide your own understanding as well as discussions with colleagues.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES give English teachers the opportunity to share successful classroom practices.

MY CLASSROOM focuses on one teacher's classroom and describes ways that the teaching environment shapes learning.

TRY THIS gives step-by-step instructions for carrying out language-learning activities in your classroom.

THE LIGHTER SIDE features an English language–based puzzle that can be photocopied and given to students to solve individually or collaboratively.

You can use the same pre-, during-, and post-reading approach to reading *Forum* articles that you might recommend to students. Before reading, consider the title and scan the text; then answer these questions:

- *What do I expect this article to be about?*
- *What do I already know about this topic?*
- *How might reading this article benefit me?*

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

- *What assumptions does the author make—about teaching, teachers, students, and learning?*
- *Are there key vocabulary words that I'm not familiar with or that the author is using in a way that is new to me? What do they seem to mean?*
- *What examples does the author use to illustrate practical content? Are the examples relevant to my teaching?*

After reading, consider answering these questions on your own and discussing them with colleagues:

- *How is the author's context similar to and different from my own?*
- *What concept—technique, approach, or activity—does the author describe? What is its purpose?*
- *Would I be able to use the same concept in my teaching? If not, how could I adapt it?*

Search for related articles at **americanenglish.state.gov/english-teaching-forum**; the archive goes back to 2001. **Submission guidelines** are also posted on the website. Email manuscripts to **etforum@state.gov**.

ON THE COVER

The image of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., was created by Chelsea Mapes, who attends the Art Institute of Washington, where she is working toward a bachelor's degree in game art and design. She previously studied at Cottey College, and she has learned the Japanese art of anime by attending conventions and teaching herself to create anime art.

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How Many Words Is a Picture Worth? Integrating Visual Literacy in Language Learning with Photographs

A photograph is usually looked at—seldom looked into.
—Ansel Adams

The phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" indicates that a complex idea can be communicated by a single image. We might spend an hour reading an article about the devastating effects an oil spill has on wildlife ecology. But a photograph of an oil-drenched pelican gasping for air evokes in us an instant emotional response. While both the article and the photograph communicate the magnitude of the damage that oil spills can cause, the power of an image allows us to grasp this message within nanoseconds.

Indeed, cognitive research has shown that the human brain processes images quicker than it processes words, and images are more likely than text to remain in our long-term memory (Levie and Lentz 1982). With the expansion of technology that allows people from all walks of life to create and share photographs with a few clicks, our world seems to value visual media more than ever before.

What if we slow down this image-viewing process to unpack those thousand words that underlie each picture? As language teachers, we may be tempted to focus our attention on the textual demands of instructional material—vocabulary, syntax, discourse, and so on—only glancing at photos as they happen to support text passages. Instead of regarding pictures as simply complementary to text, I suggest that we put images at the forefront of instruction, embracing the possibilities that visual media offer for language learning. Photographs hold potential for eliciting language across all four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Incorporating images in language instruction will appeal to digital native learners, those students who grew up in a world where using smartphones, laptops, and social media is part of everyday life (Prensky 2001).

However, these digital natives are not intuitively adept at analyzing and critiquing images, skills that can be considered part of visual literacy (Brumberger 2011). Knowing how to upload smartphone photographs to Facebook or Instagram does not make someone visually literate. We are too often

passive consumers of images in the media, missing out on opportunities to explore underlying messages that the creators may consciously or unconsciously convey.

Communicative language classrooms are an ideal location to cultivate the visual literacy skills involved in viewing and creating images. In this article, I describe ways to use images to support students' language skills while honing their abilities to analyze and create messages; sophisticated technology or high-resolution cameras are not required. I first summarize ways educators have defined visual literacy, provide a rationale for connecting visual literacy to the language classroom, and then give examples of instructional techniques with photographs.

WHAT IS VISUAL LITERACY?

As archaeologists uncovering hieroglyphics can attest, using images to create and interpret messages has distinguished humans from other living things since the dawn of civilization (Burmark 2002). The term *visual literacy*, however, did not appear in education literature until 1969, when Debes described the concept as a set of competencies that "a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences" (1969, 27). Debes argued that these visual competencies enable individuals to communicate with others, establishing a clear connection between visual literacy and language education.

Over the past four decades, scholars and practitioners from a variety of fields have conceptualized visual literacy, offering perspectives ranging from theoretical to pragmatic (Schiller 1987). The absence of a common definition suggests the complexity of the processes involved in interpreting and creating visual messages. For the purposes of this article, I assume a relatively broad definition of the term that reflects seminal concepts from the literature: visual literacy is the competency to make meaning from what we see and to create images that convey implicit and explicit messages to others.

CONNECTING VISUAL LITERACY WITH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Images have played a critical part in my work as an English language teacher and teacher trainer. Pictures are sometimes used to support comprehension, as a scaffolding tool to help students quickly associate unfamiliar words with concepts (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002). However, images also hold the power to stimulate complex language use, pushing students to extend their abilities. Therefore, while visual literacy can be integrated with different content areas, activities with images make an especially effective contribution to language learning.

Meaningful oral interaction

Exploring visual images can stimulate extended linguistic production. The way we perceive pictures depends on our existing schema, a product of memories and past experiences unique to each of us. Because interpretation of what we see is subjective, analyzing images provides opportunities for meaningful student-to-student interaction. When using images in the English language classroom, challenge students to share the feelings that an image provokes or express why they like or dislike particular photographs. This kind of oral interaction is truly communicative.

Critical thinking skills

Rarely is there only one way to understand an image, and expressing opinions takes infinite forms. Interpreting images requires skills high on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, such as evaluating, synthesizing, and analyzing. Often called "critical thinking skills," Bloom's higher-order skills are essential when communicating abstract thoughts through language. Visual literacy activities can help students hone these skills. For instance, instructional techniques that foster visual literacy call for open-ended questions, such as those beginning with "Why" and "What if," that require extended responses and higher-order thinking skills. Justifying why they understand images in particular ways requires students to analyze pieces of

Images provide a means for students to interact with phenomena from across the world.

the image before producing a response based on evidence from the image. Stating that one "likes" or "does not like" an image is not sufficient for visual literacy; instead, students are challenged to link vocabulary from the visual representations with abstract ideas or past experiences.

Global perspectives

Images provide a means for students to interact with phenomena from across the world; observing images from different perspectives occurs in seconds and can be done by learners of all language levels. And perspective taking, or seeing phenomena from a point of view other than one's own, is associated with language acquisition and development (MacWhinney 2005); in fact, MacWhinney argues that "perspective taking is at the very core of language structure" (198). Photographs compel the viewer to observe objects by the way in which the camera frames them. Comparing different photographs of the same image reinforces students' recognition that an object can be shown in different ways, not unlike the way a concept can be expressed using different languages. Images enable students to perceive objects not only from varying spatial perspectives, but also to explore visual stimuli from different global perspectives.

Potential for scaffolding

Using images can serve as a type of instructional scaffolding, the construct described by Bruner (1975) as specialized support that facilitates learning tasks that are beyond the independent capacity of the student. Images can be used as an intermediary support for students who have not yet mastered particular vocabulary or sentence structures. For instance, teachers might refer to photographs or icons when introducing new topics or vocabulary so that students quickly grasp the meaning of new terms. Using graphic organizers to spatially represent conceptual relationships is another example of support in language activities. Research shows that students who utilize these kinds of visual aids perform better on language tasks than those who do not (Baratta and Jones 2008; Nunan 1999). Importantly, though, scaffolding mechanisms are by definition temporary; the supports should eventually be removed as students gain more proficiency and are able to complete tasks independently. The goal is not to eliminate visual elements from instruction, but instead to change gradually the ways students use images as supports. For instance, beginning language learners might move from making single word utterances to labeling items in a photograph to forming complex sentences that make inferences about the context of the photograph.

Linking content with language

Visual literacy activities also provide an opportunity to link language to content (e.g., science, math, social studies). Language researchers have long called for language education to be linked to content, whether it be through a structured instructional program, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010) or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, and Short 2012), or simply by using thematic topics that are meaningful for students. Using images in the classroom is one way to enhance the content so that students interact with language to communicate about a particular concept rather than memorizing grammar or vocabulary in ways that may seem arbitrary. Images are a form of authentic material. Just as educators intentionally choose texts they use in the classroom, they should also strategically select images to complement content learning goals. Content material can be integrated into any of the strategies described in this article, thereby transforming a language lesson into one that meets the goals of the content classroom as well.

Next, I describe four strategies for integrating visual literacy into language instruction. The

only required materials for the activities are photographs.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USING VISUAL IMAGES

Strategy 1: Photo Analysis

The practice of photo analysis facilitates students' observation skills while challenging them to identify and use language that is part of the photograph. This activity, which is adapted from an online lesson at the National Archives and Records Administration (www.archives.gov/education/lessons), works best when students work in groups of four.

Preparation

For each group of students, select one photograph of an event that is familiar or relevant to your students. All groups can work with the same image, or you can distribute a different photograph to each group. If possible, print copies of the photograph so that each student has his or her own copy. In addition, students will need a three-column chart with the headings "People," "Things," and "Actions." They can make this chart themselves, or you can create one for them.

Step 1. Discuss the overall impression

Student groups discuss their initial impression of the photograph. To guide discussion, you can ask questions such as:

- What is going on?
- What is this photograph about?
- How does this photograph make you feel?

For instance, a photograph of a crowd waving signs and flags outside a government building may be an example of democracy-in-action with peaceful protestors, evoking feelings of patriotism or excitement among some students. On the other hand, a photograph of a nearly empty city alley with a seemingly poor person next to a tourist may be about urban poverty and evoke feelings of sadness. Because students will return to these initial ideas later in the activity, they should make notes of their ideas or jot down words they associate with the photograph. Depending on the group and the photograph, students might have different and even contrasting opinions. For example, some students may associate the photograph of the crowd of people with dangerous subversion rather than patriotism. Encourage groups to jot down all representative ideas. Forming a holistic impression does not need to take longer than five minutes, but discussing the photograph as a whole ensures that students have a clear context of the photograph before they focus on details.

Step 2. Observe closely

Divide the photograph into four quadrants. Assign one student in each group to a quadrant. Students might cover up the other parts of the photograph with a blank piece of paper so they can focus on their assigned quadrant.

Step 3. List

Students use the three-column chart to list people, things, and actions they see in their quadrant. Challenge them to list as many items as they can.

Step 4. Share

Students share the items on their list with their group members. Because each student observes a separate quadrant of the photograph, the lists will be different.

Step 5. Compare parts to the whole

Students then return to their initial impressions. They discuss how their lists support (or do not support) these impressions. Instruct students to "identify items on your list," "support your initial impression," or "use your list to tell why you had your initial impression." Viewing an image holistically and then moving to an examination of details gives students opportunities to defend ideas with examples and to practice critical thinking skills. For instance, students might justify that the photograph of the demonstrators made them feel patriotic because it shows people waving

flags. Or they might say that they knew one of the people in the city alley image was a tourist because he had a camera around his neck. Alternately, students might use the details to challenge their initial impressions. Perhaps they originally assumed that one of the people in the city alley was a beggar, but upon closer inspection realized that while the person next to the tourist was wearing tattered clothing, he was not actually asking for anything.

Step 6. Make inferences

Using the compiled lists and initial impressions, students in each group agree on three inferences they can make about the photograph. Each inference must include justification based on the people, things, or actions they observed in the photograph. This means students will use the vocabulary they noted on their three-column list. This is an opportunity to help students understand how to infer and what an inference is. Make sure students understand these terms by explicitly pointing out that making overall impressions based on details is an example of inferring. Explain that inferences are based on observable facts (e.g., items on their lists) but can also involve invisible assumptions. For instance, students might infer that people are demonstrating for a political cause in one of the photographs because gathering in crowds with signs and flags—an observation from the photograph—is in many countries a means for expressing dissent to the government, a fact that may be part of students' background knowledge.

Step 7. Pose questions

Lastly, students extend their thinking by listing open-ended questions that the photograph raises. These should be questions that are not easily answered by looking at the photograph, but instead require additional investigation about the context of the photograph. Such questions might begin with "Why … " or "What if … ." For the photograph with the crowds of people, students might ask, "Why are they demonstrating?"

Adaptations and supports

- Vary the items that students write on their three-column list to match the content of the photograph or class-wide language-learning objectives. For instance, rather than listing people, things, and actions, a class that is focusing on descriptive words might list colors, shapes, and textures.

- When instructing students to make inferences, require that they use the words they compiled in complete sentences. If necessary, provide sentence stems such as, "I infer _____ because I see _____ and _____."

- To help students grasp the concept of *inference*, provide a graphic. One example is a math equation: the word *inference* equals an icon of a pair of eyes, to represent observable items, plus an icon of a thought bubble, to represent background knowledge.

- As a follow-up to this activity, students can postulate answers to their questions or brainstorm ways to find the answers.

Strategy 2: Mystery Photo

In this activity, the instructor obscures a photograph and gradually reveals parts of it for students to guess the image. Like the Photo Analysis activity, Mystery Photo elicits descriptive language. This activity also engages students in inductive reasoning, providing an element of suspense that involves the language of prediction.

Select a photograph that is pertinent to an upcoming topic as a way to introduce students to the new content and pique their interest.

Preparation

Select a photograph. Photographs with multiple items, colors, or people work well because one section of a photograph may be completely different from another. For instance, famous landmarks pictured from a distance show perspectives that are not usually captured in guidebooks. Alternately, zoomed photographs, in which a relatively small item fills the space, are also effective because identifying the image is difficult without being able to perceive it as a whole.

Once a photograph has been selected, prepare five to eight pieces of paper that completely cover the photograph. If a computer and projector are available, consider using PowerPoint by inserting a digital photograph, placing opaque text boxes on top of it, and then animating the boxes so that they can disappear one at a time.

Step 1. Obscure the photograph

Show students the photograph completely covered by pieces of paper, like puzzle pieces.

Step 2. Uncover the photograph

Students gradually uncover the photograph by selecting pieces of paper to remove. You might number the pieces covering the photograph so that students can easily identify the pieces they want to remove. If you are conducting this activity with the entire class, establish a procedure for selecting students to uncover each square. One strategy is to write students' names on pieces of paper, then draw a name randomly. After students understand the procedure, they might engage in this activity in groups of four to six students. Each group has a separate photograph, and students take turns uncovering it.

Step 3. Make guesses

As each section of the photograph is revealed, students describe what they see. Students then hypothesize about what the full image may entail. As more pieces are revealed, not only will students use the description of each section to make their hypotheses, but they will also need to connect to the prior pieces. In making these guesses, students practice using the language of prediction (e.g., "I predict that it will be … " or "I think it will be … ") as well as vocabulary associated with the photograph. With a large class, rather than calling on only one or two students to share, ask students to talk with a neighboring student about their predictions. Such pair work ensures that all students are engaged and using the predictive language.

Step 4. Debrief

After the final reveal of the image, students talk about the process of guessing what the photograph might be. This kind of discussion involves metacognition, as students articulate how they were able to connect pieces of the image to form the full image. To facilitate this discussion, ask questions such as, "Were you surprised about the photograph?" Or "At what point could you identify the photograph's content?" Or "Which part of the photograph gave it away?" A debriefing conversation also allows students to discuss how seeing only a piece of a picture often gives different connotations and perspectives than seeing the photograph in its entirety. When I used a photograph of a saltwater fish tank with colorful coral formations, students said they first thought the photograph showed a high-end handbag store in the mall. It was not until I uncovered bubbles in a top corner that they realized the photograph was under water.

Adaptations and support

- When describing pieces of the photograph, students with beginning English proficiency may use one- or two-word utterances; more advanced students can be challenged to use complex sentences.

- Students might also move from describing concrete objects in the photograph to expressing subjective impressions of each part, such as feelings or memories that the images provoke.

- As an extension, students might work in groups to develop their own mystery images and facilitate the activity with

peers. To enhance language use, students can give hints about the photo to help their peers identify the full image.

- This activity might work well as a warm-up, especially once students are familiar with the procedure. Select a photograph that is pertinent to an upcoming topic as a way to introduce students to the new content and pique their interest. For example, I used this activity when teaching about habitats. At the beginning of each unit, I selected a mystery photograph of the particular habitat we were studying (grassland, rainforest, etc.). Students not only engaged in inductive thinking, but they also previewed concepts and vocabulary associated with the upcoming lesson.

Strategy 3: Collaborative Stories

As its name suggests, Collaborative Stories involves storytelling by a group of students and reinforces narrative structures, a concept required in content-area literature classes. Using images as prompts, students work together to produce a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Preparation

Select three photographs. The photographs could have a common theme or setting and should include people or animals. A current or recently studied topic might connect the photographs. The activity also works well if the images share no discernible theme. In fact, dissimilar photographs offer an additional cognitive challenge for students, as they will have to create their own links.

Step 1. Group students

Arrange students in groups of three. Explain that each group will work together to create a story based on a series of three photographs. To focus on writing skills, require that students write the narrative of the story as they create it. Students in each group count off from one to three.

Step 2. Display the first photograph

This photograph might be the same for the entire class or different for each group. The students assigned number one create the beginning of a story based on the people or events shown in the photograph. Instruct students to describe the main character and setting, and to introduce a problem for their story. While the first student is speaking, the other students in the group listen, as they will soon need to continue the story. Instruct students to include as many details as possible connected to the photograph while also creating a narrative story.

Step 3. Display the second photograph

Students assigned number two will continue the story but bring in details from the second photograph. This process challenges students to make connections to the beginning of the story while also integrating details from the second photograph. The second part of the story should expand on the problem introduced by the first student.

Step 4. Display the third photograph

Students assigned number three use details from the third photograph to conclude the story that their group members started. Remind students that the conclusion should involve the resolution of the problem introduced and described by the first and second students.

Step 5. Share completed stories

Students in each group review all three photographs and retell their story. If you have time, each group can share its completed story with the class. Discuss how the same photographs elicited different stories from all groups of students.

Adaptations and supports

- If students struggle to think of a story, ask them to consider questions such as, "Who is the person in the photograph?"; "What is the person doing?"; "Why is the person doing this?"; and "What happened right before this photo was taken?"

- Provide supportive scaffolds by giving story-starter prompts such as, "Once upon a time there was … " or sequencing terms such as, "First," "Next," "Then,"

and "Finally." Another way to support students is to provide vocabulary words or phrases related to the photograph.

- Create a graphic organizer showing the elements involved in the beginning, middle, and end of stories. See Table 1 for an example.

- To facilitate fluency and speed, limit the time allotted for students to describe the photograph. Select photographs that elicit target vocabulary or sentence structures, or photographs that include themes from content-area classes, such as photographs of historical events that students may be studying in their history classes.

- During this activity, two students have the task of listening to one speaker. If students complete this activity as a writing task, rather than a speaking task, then potentially two students will be idle while one student writes. To engage all students simultaneously, distribute the three photographs at once: give a different picture to each student. Everyone will write a beginning based on his or her photograph, then rotate the photographs so that the image one student used to write the beginning will be the image the next student in the group uses to write the middle, and so on. This way, all students will be writing—or reading each other's stories—at the same time. By the end of the activity, each group will have produced three distinct stories using the same three photographs, but in different sequences.

- Students might also work collaboratively. Partners or small groups could write or tell a story about an image together. Groups could approach the story holistically, writing a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and then tell or read their story to the class.

Strategy 4: Selfies

The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013 was *selfie*—a photograph of oneself taken by oneself. In today's culture of smartphones and webcams, selfies are growing in popularity. Educators can exploit this trend to motivate students, integrating the concept into language instruction. Using selfies gives students a sense of ownership in their learning, as they are not only interpreting photographs, but also creating them. Rather than describing a step-by-step procedure for the selfie activities, I provide a general description of how to apply selfies to three established instructional strategies that are familiar to many language teachers.

Beginning	Middle	End
Sequencing phrases to develop story		
In the beginning … A long time ago … Once upon a time …	After that … Then … Next … A little while later …	Finally … At last … In the end …
Question prompts to provide story ideas		
Who are the main characters? Where is the setting? What is the problem?	Tell more about the problem. What happens to the characters? How do the characters try to solve the problem?	What is the solution to the problem? What happens to the characters? How are things different at the end than they were at the beginning?

Table 1. Graphic organizer for Collaborative Stories

1. Information Gap

In information-gap activities, students have different pieces of information and must communicate with each other to complete a task. Long noted as an effective technique in communicative classrooms (e.g., Doughty and Pica 1986), information gaps engage students in authentic conversations that require asking and answering referential questions. For example, students receive different parts of a map and are instructed to talk with each other to complete their map, literally filling in the gaps. Teachers can adapt this activity using images so that only one student in a pair has an image and the other student must ask questions in order to recreate the image. Using selfies is a way to personalize the activity. Unlike random photographs, selfies involve language beyond basic description of the photograph, as students engage in narrative stories to tell background contexts that only personal photographs can elicit.

2. Speech Bubbles

One instructional technique in language classrooms is to use cartoons with speech bubbles. Teachers can delete the words in the speech bubbles and ask students to provide language based on the cartoon images. As an adaptation using selfies, students write in speech bubbles to tell what they are thinking in the selfie. Putting words to their photographs adds an element of self-reflection. Moreover, the limited space of a thought bubble requires precision in language, a high-level skill. Students can complete this activity using their own selfie, or they may exchange selfies and guess what their peers are thinking or saying in the photograph. To engage in creative thinking, students can brainstorm multiple options for the speech bubble. Students with advanced language skills might develop a selfie with a speech bubble into a story, describing what happened before and after the selfie was taken. You can activate oral language use by arranging students in pairs or small groups so that they need to talk with each other to determine the best option for the speech bubble.

3. Selfie Story

Teachers often provide opportunities for students to share details about their lives outside the class. For instance, students might describe what they did over the weekend or bring in an artifact from their home and tell why it is important to them. Selfies can enhance the traditional sharing activities. If students have access to cameras, they can take selfies as a homework assignment. You might assign students to take photos of themselves at their favorite places. This activity works particularly well during extended breaks when students have time to go different places. Students then use their selfies to tell stories about what they did outside school. Collaborative student groups and pairs work well; students use their selfie as a springboard to share with each other about what they did. You can require students in the audience to ask the speaker meaningful questions as a way for students to practice active listening skills. To integrate literacy skills, ask students to write a story about their activities.

SOURCES FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

Locating photographs to use in the classroom should not pose a problem for teachers with Internet access. In fact, the challenge may be selecting the appropriate photograph, as a Google Images search might populate thousands of instantly available images. As with selecting any teaching materials, it is important to be purposeful and systematic when choosing photographs to use in instruction. Consider the possibilities to link content to instruction by choosing photographs that include themes from other courses that students are taking. At the same time, think about photographs that would capture students' attention or appeal to their interests in order to heighten motivation. Before applying the instructional activities with particular photographs, "try out" the activity as a student using different possible photographs. By previewing the activity from a student perspective, you can identify the vocabulary and sentence structures that the photograph might elicit. You will also be able to anticipate challenges students may encounter and be prepared to offer support.

Use magazine photographs to facilitate discussions about digitally altered photographs, helping students become critical viewers rather than passive consumers.

Perhaps the best sources of photographs are you and your students. Make a habit of taking along your camera (or camera phone) during special events or travels, as well as in your daily life, so you can capture unexpected phenomena that you come across. Students are often interested in learning about their teachers as people outside the classroom, and your photographs allow you to share selected details about your personal life in an instructional way. Furthermore, you know the circumstances in which you took your photos, and this background context can be used to enhance conversations about the images.

Likewise, not only can students take selfies, but they can also snap photos of places and people they encounter inside and outside school. Depending on the age and background of your students, though, you might need to teach students about camera etiquette, such as when it is and is not appropriate to take photos. You need to instruct students to ask permission before taking photographs of people's faces. In addition, remind students about appropriate content for school. What is considered appropriate will vary from school to school depending on local and national context. Refer to standards at your institution and provide clear parameters for students' photographs.

Other sources of photographs are media, such as newspapers and magazines. While these sources do not offer the personalization that your own photographs do, they open opportunities for discussing or critiquing mass media, and students can discuss underlying political or social messages. For instance, you might ask students to contrast how magazines or websites with different political affiliations portray the same individual. You might also use magazine photographs to facilitate discussions about digitally altered photographs, helping students become critical viewers rather than passive consumers. Have students look for photographs in advertisements and calendars, and on photo-rich websites such as the *National Geographic* site (photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography).

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Internet not only provides sources for photographs, but it also offers interactive websites for students to manipulate photographs as part of language activities. Internet access is not a necessary condition for applying any of the instructional strategies described in this article; however, for teachers and students who have access to computers with Internet connections, online tools can be used to enhance the activities. Table 2 provides a non-exhaustive annotated list of websites for visual literacy activities that have the potential to elicit language use. You can refer to these websites as resources for ideas to adapt your own lesson plans or use the direct links for student activities. Note that the website links listed may change or be deleted at any time. Likewise, educators and scholars are regularly creating new websites, so it is a good idea to conduct your own Internet searches for websites. While many photographs on the Internet are protected by copyright, educators can use them freely under the Classroom Use Exemption if they use the material in an instructional setting (e.g., classroom), provide face-to-face or in-person teaching, and work at a nonprofit educational institution. If you do not qualify for the Classroom Use Exemption, you might email the website publisher to explain your situation and ask for written permission to use the material.

Site Name	Web Address	Description	Considerations
Fotobabble	fotobabble.com	Users record their voice for up to one minute as they talk about particular photographs. After each recording, users can listen to their voice and have the option to re-record.	To use this site, you must complete a free registration process. An application for smartphones is also available. This activity supports speaking skills and provides a safe space for students to self-evaluate their pronunciation. One idea is for students to complete a recording at the beginning of the course and then at the end to assess their speaking progress.
Image Detective	cct2.edc.org/PMA/image_detective	Students answer guided questions about historical photographs and can access background information about the photos and time period.	The images on this site are based on U.S. history. However, you can adapt this activity for use with other historical photographs. The interactive website is not needed but can serve as a model for asking questions, gathering clues, researching background information, and drawing conclusions.
What's Going On in This Picture?	learning.blogs.nytimes.com/category/lesson-plans/whats-going-on-in-this-picture	Includes daily photographs from *The New York Times* with three guiding questions: (1) What's going on in this picture? (2) What do you see that makes you say that? (3) What more can you find? Explanations that provide background information about the photos are available.	You can use other photographs from local newspapers and ask the same three questions. To support reading comprehension, you can use this activity as a pre-reading strategy before reading a newspaper or magazine article.
Pic-Lits	piclits.com	Users select a digital photograph from a series that changes daily. They label the image with words to create a "pic-lit." Users can choose from "Freestyle," in which they type their own words, or "Drag-n-drop," in which they select words from a list organized by part of speech.	The selection of images changes daily. You can differentiate the activity for students with varying levels of English skills. Advanced students can choose the "Freestyle" option and write a poem or creative writing piece about the photograph. Beginning students can choose the "Drag-n-drop" option and label items in the photograph to build vocabulary.

Table 2. Interactive websites for images

CONCLUSION

Educators have long emphasized the importance of authentic learning experiences for English learners. Activities in the language class are effective if they replicate the kinds of interactions that students encounter outside the classroom. In today's world of smartphone cameras and Instagram and Facebook applications, images play a central role in our students' lives, whether they are young learners or adults. Photographs should thus be part of the authentic learning experiences we strive to create. We can draw upon images to elicit communicative language from students through activities such as those described in this article. As students become familiar with ways to talk about images, visual literacy can be integrated into daily classroom routines. Rather than a stand-alone lesson, discussions about photographs can occur regularly to enhance other learning.

To conclude, I return to the opening quote from Ansel Adams, a prominent American photographer: "A photograph is usually looked at—seldom looked into." Adams recognized the potential that photographs have to elicit meaningful conversation. While images are often touted as a means to communicate messages faster than words can, I suggest that we take Adams' implicit advice to linger on photographs, exploring the layered understandings that each photograph contains. The activities described in this article cultivate reflective students who are able to "look into" photographs by eliciting deep thinking, creativity, and sophisticated language. Along with trying out these activities, I challenge us as educators to hone our own observation skills, searching for ways to take advantage of the language-use possibilities that lie within images we—and our students—encounter every day.

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Encouraging Learners to Create Language-Learning Materials

Student-produced materials are a powerful tool for promoting learner autonomy. They challenge the traditional paradigm of education because the very concept of learner-produced materials is based on trust in the student-centered learning process; when developing materials, learners do not rely on the teacher to make every decision.

Although material-development tasks are typically initiated and guided by the instructor, students are eventually left alone to create and shape their own learning. They brainstorm, plan, and make decisions as well as assess and improve their work. In short, they use their English and critical-thinking skills. The nature of English also changes in such a context: it is not only a language to be learned but also a means of communication to complete a complex task.

In this article, I will highlight the educational value of learner-produced materials and discuss methods to encourage students to create materials. As they do, they review content themselves, provide opportunities for peers to review content and engage in peer learning, and contribute to the collection of stored materials available to other classes and future students. I will also describe a few material-development activities aimed at empowering learners to practice and improve their English.

WHY ENCOURAGE LEARNERS TO CREATE MATERIALS?

Creating materials is an arduous job because it involves a number of challenges. A materials writer has to be creative, competent, and sensitive to his or her educational context. One might argue that most students are not ready to cope with such a heavy load; however, students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Most of them have enough creativity and imagination to deal with tasks that are not within the scope of their classroom routine. At the same time, it would be wrong to challenge students if, in the end, they are not going to develop as language learners. This raises an important question: what are the benefits of learner-generated materials?

One benefit of student-designed materials is that they contribute to peer teaching and learning. For instance, students might facilitate other people's learning by creating and submitting materials to the self-access center (SAC) of their college. According to Malcolm (2004), students in Bahrain were required to submit materials to their SAC as part of their self-directed learning program. The materials designed were mainly worksheets with crosswords, gap fills, multiple-choice exercises, and so on. In addition to submitting materials, the students were requested to evaluate their

peers' contributions to the SAC. Malcolm (2004) states that most student-made activities were useful and appreciated. Yet the evaluation conducted at the end of the academic year revealed that only around a third of the students considered their contributions to the SAC valuable. The author attributes such reaction to the students' deep-rooted belief that they were consumers, not producers, of knowledge, and speculates that some learners might have been annoyed by the extra work imposed on them. Nevertheless, the project offers guidance for teachers interested in involving learners in materials creation.

But teachers should be aware that there are other potential benefits and other types of learner-created materials. For example, developing materials might take students one step further toward better English. Stewart (2010) describes a project carried out with her immigrant students; in an effort to empower her learners to write with *voice*—one's personal and unique way to express thoughts—she asked them to produce a book of stories, essays, and poetry exploring the issue of immigration. Stewart reports that at the end of the project, students felt more motivated to read and write in English as well as use voice in their writing. They also felt they were able to define their identities as immigrants when describing their personal experiences.

Materials creation as a joint endeavor helps learners enjoy one of the key components of collaborative learning: active engagement. According to Maltese (1991), student-created puppet shows and yearbooks featuring the novel *Lord of the Flies* allowed learners not only to read well but also to visualize and experience the reading material.

Student-generated materials also have the potential to encourage students to become more autonomous. Bhattacharya and Chauhan (2010) report on a study in which students were asked to create an individual blog including two articles; the first was an academic assignment derived from their syllabus, and the second explored a niche topic students considered worth discussing. The students sent emails advertising their blogs, commented on one another's blogs, and shared information. The results of the study revealed that blog-assisted language learning can contribute to learner autonomy, as it helps students develop their language and cognitive skills while empowering them to make more informed choices regarding their decisions.

These studies serve as a starting point for instructors interested in incorporating students' materials into their teaching. Since results are limited to the contexts where the studies have been conducted, it is desirable for instructors to do their own research to investigate the effect of student-created materials on students' learning and determine which types of materials are most beneficial for their students to create.

FACILITATING MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Producing materials can be a face-threatening experience for students if they are not trained. Here, training means not only modeling a task for learners, but also creating an atmosphere where designing and sharing materials is a natural extension of everyday learning.

Having experimented with student-created materials for almost three years, I have recorded eight principles to guide myself. These principles are, of course, affected by my own teaching experience in the Omani educational context. However, other teachers might find them transferable to their teaching and learning contexts.

Materials creation as a joint endeavor helps learners enjoy one of the key components of collaborative learning: active engagement.

1. *Believe in students' creativity.* If teachers have basic trust in their class, no matter how unmotivated it seems to be, they should have the courage to train students to complete difficult tasks. This does not presuppose blind trust in students' abilities: teachers have to be aware of the difficulties students face. However, treating students as creative individuals is of great help. To show learners that their creativity is appreciated, teachers could, for instance, read student stories, essays, or poems to the class.

2. *Set a clear goal for each activity.* If teachers decide to review questions in the present simple tense, they can ask students to produce a sentence-scramble exercise including such questions. Establishing a purpose allows students to alert themselves to important information. In addition, it helps teachers use their time in the best possible manner (Fisher and Frey 2011).

3. *Refer students to something familiar.* According to schema theory, past experiences cause people to create mental networks that will eventually help them figure out new experiences (Liu 2012). That is why it is best to ask learners to develop materials similar to those they have seen in textbooks and class handouts.

4. *Let students work on simple tasks first.* Learners need to get into the habit of developing materials. It is desirable that they create simple exercises before doing more demanding and time-consuming tasks. For example, they can start with five-item matching exercises and only then, after completing them, work on more complex projects.

5. *Provide examples.* To visualize their future creations, students should first analyze the content and structure of a similar type of material. For example, they could focus on the words in a sample crossword puzzle and then discuss the direction of cells (across and down) and types of clues (definitions or example sentences).

6. *Give scaffolded feedback.* Scaffolding comprises much more than giving students the right solution to a problem. Teachers lead learners toward solving a proposed problem by hinting at correct answers or giving them advice or information that will enable them to think about the problem (Finn and Metcalfe 2010). Instructors should steer learners in the right direction rather than give a set of dogmatic instructions.

7. *Have students share their work.* Knowing that their materials (e.g., wikis) will be evaluated by their instructor and peers motivates students to invest more effort in their work (Weber 2013). Therefore, learners need an opportunity to share their creations in class or submit them to the instructor for further use.

8. *Store students' materials.* Instructors should create an easily accessible database of the best materials. Having constant access to student-generated materials will help teachers not only supplement their teaching but also model materials production for future students. Such a database will also allow instructors to share students' materials with their colleagues.

Teachers can refer to these principles before asking their learners to develop materials, while the learners are developing the materials, and after learners have finished. In fact, examining these guidelines after students produce a certain material helps teachers reflect on their own performance and look for ways to overcome the challenges students have encountered.

WHAT KINDS OF MATERIALS CAN LEARNERS DEVELOP?

Students can develop a variety of materials ranging from visuals to crossword puzzles.

Ideally, all materials that learners develop should help them become better users of English. In addition, the materials should supplement and support the course(s) learners are taking. For example, medical students can develop their own pronunciation dictionary of medical terms to help themselves articulate the vocabulary items they are learning. Likewise, law students might stage a mock trial that allows them to use legal English in a meaningful context and in the process develop documents, worksheets on useful phrases and procedures, and mock-trial guidelines for future classes. Teachers simply need to choose activities that are useful and potentially interesting for their students.

I usually ask students to work in pairs because pair work gives them better chances to contribute to the final product. The two students are encouraged to share responsibility and work hard, as there is no other person to help. However, teachers might need to divide their students into groups, depending on class size or the type of activity. Working individually is also an option if teachers feel a student can cope on his or her own.

Following are five activities I have used with my elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate learners (18- to 20-year-old university students). They can also be used with students of other ages and levels. For instance, young learners might enjoy creating a word-scramble exercise if they are asked to include the names of colors or animals. I have used these activities during one class period; therefore, they are described in the form of a step-by-step plan to help teachers visualize what they need to do. The activities might last for forty to sixty minutes, depending on students' abilities and level of English.

Activity 1: Student-Produced Text

Instructors can promote learner-centered teaching and learning by asking their students to produce reading material. First of all, student-generated texts might boost learners' motivation. Cloud, Lakin, and Leininger (2011) report that having students create stories about their names and contribute those to a unit compiled by the teachers turned their students into highly motivated learners. Second, students will feel more in control of their own learning when they create their reading material. Another advantage of student-created texts is that they offer valuable insight into students' needs and interests (Chou et al. 2007).

Teachers can adopt two approaches to student-produced text. They can promote traditional sharing (i.e., students read and comment on their peers' essays, stories, poems, blogs, and so on). Alternatively, a learner-created text can serve as a stimulus for another activity. I am in favor of the latter approach because it is related to peer teaching: students produce materials to give their peers an opportunity to improve their English. One such activity allows students to enhance their writing skills by working on *story starters*—the first three to five lines of an incomplete story—produced by their peers, as in the following steps:

a. Conduct a whole-class discussion about what kinds of stories students like to read and write.

b. Explain what a story starter is. Be ready to show students an example if necessary.

c. Inform learners that each of them needs to write a story starter. Emphasize that the story starters need to grab their peers' attention. If you are using story starters to help students review past simple and past progressive, for example, you could first elicit what they know about the formation and usage of these tenses. You can also assign different topics, or students can be asked to create their own scenarios. They can also come up with their own interpretations of the same topic; for instance, they can all write about a scary night (real or fictional), but any topic that fits students' interests and experiences could work. Walk around the class and provide help as needed.

d. After students finish writing, divide them into pairs. Ask them to exchange

their story starters. Tell students to finish their partners' stories. You can make the activity more competitive by telling students that there is a prize for the best story.

e. If there is time, have students read their stories and, if you want, ask the class to vote on their favorite. The pair who has produced the best story can get a small prize. You could also ask students to hand in their stories and, after you read them, you can announce the winner in the next class.

One option is to ask students to read their stories in groups of four. Each student reads his or her story to the group, and the group chooses the best one. Each group then nominates a speaker to read the story to the class. Each student in the group explains why he or she likes the story. Encourage students to say as much as they can; otherwise, they will be tempted to produce simplistic utterances like "I loved it" or "It is interesting." Instead, they can focus on the content (actions and characters described in the story) and language (grammar, vocabulary, and spelling). It is their chance to use English meaningfully while reflecting on a peer's work.

Story starters can be a source of inspiration for teachers and students; they can also enrich other teachers' repertoire of activities. For instance, the best story starters can be compiled in a book and then published. The book could also include the best stories based on students' story starters. Later, the book can be used by the same school or shared with other schools that may be experiencing a shortage of teaching materials.

Quizzes

Most students take quizzes on a regular basis. Why not ask them to design a quiz of their own? This exercise might help them feel their contributions are valued by the teacher. At the same time, students get a chance to review what they have already learned. Activities 2 and 3 provide examples for teachers who would like to encourage their learners to design reading and spelling quizzes.

Activity 2: Reading Quizzes

One thing teachers can do is ask students to write comprehension questions about a reading passage. When writing the questions, students have a chance to process the text by focusing on its main idea and details. In addition, they will learn new vocabulary. To facilitate quiz development, teachers can follow these steps:

a. Mentally, divide your class into pairs before the lesson. Then select two texts (Set A and Set B) from a review unit in the textbook you are using in order to expose students to similar content. If there are no review units, you could select two other texts. If there are 20 students, the first five pairs will get a text from Set A, and the other five will get a text from Set B.

b. Bring the texts to class. Divide students into pairs and distribute the texts.

c. Encourage students to read carefully. They need to understand the text thoroughly in order to write proper questions. Allow them to use dictionaries if they want.

d. After students finish reading, elicit information about two question types: True/False and Wh– questions. Write an example of each on the board. If you are dealing with an advanced class ready to cope with a challenge, include multiple-choice questions as well.

Story starters can be a source of inspiration for teachers and students; they can also enrich other teachers' repertoire of activities.

e. Inform students they need to write at least five questions (depending on the length of the passage) about the text they have read. Emphasize that they can mix different types of questions. For example, they can write two Wh– questions and three True/False questions.

f. When the questions are ready, ask students to exchange their text and questions with a pair that worked with a different text. Provide learners with enough time to read and answer their peers' questions.

g. Students exchange the questions again and check their peers' answers.

h. Allow students to give feedback to their peers. Have them sit with the pair that has answered their questions. Encourage students to refer their peers to the text while giving feedback. The feedback could relate to the questions that were developed by one pair or to the answers given by the other pair.

The teacher could also photocopy a different text for each pair. Another option is to ask everyone to work on the same text. This option will save the teacher preparation time and allow him or her to give feedback on the quality of students' questions.

Activity 3: Spelling Quizzes

Spelling is a major problem for many English learners. To help them master the intricacies of English spelling, I ask them to develop simple spelling quizzes consisting of a word scramble and an error-correction exercise. I have chosen these two exercise types because my students seem to enjoy unscrambling words and correcting spelling mistakes. Other teachers are free to include the items they find suitable. Nevertheless, they could first examine the steps I have described below.

a. Provide students with a sample quiz. You can either write it on the board or make photocopies for your students. If there is an overhead projector in your classroom, you might display the quiz on the screen. You should end up with a quiz like that in Figure 1. You do not have to include the given words in your quiz; however, it is best to provide words your students tend to misspell.

b. Ask students to take the quiz you have provided. This task should not take too much time because there are only two exercises and four items.

c. Divide students into pairs. Tell them they need to create a similar quiz for their peers. Ask them to choose words they normally misspell. They need to include five items in each exercise.

d. Give students enough time to complete their quizzes. Monitor and provide assistance if needed.

e. Tell learners to exchange the quizzes and check their peers' answers. Then select two or three quizzes and read aloud some of the words students have used. Ask individual learners to spell the words. Write them on the board.

An option, if you want students to take multiple quizzes, is to ask each pair to post its quiz on the wall. Allow students to mingle and take as many quizzes as possible. Tell them to write the answers on their own paper; otherwise, the original will become unusable.

Spelling Quiz

1. Unscramble the two words below.
   a. dgsein –
   b. tehri –
2. Correct the spelling errors in the two words below.
   a. becouse –
   b. communicat –

Figure 1. Spelling Quiz

If teachers find spelling quizzes boring, they can tell students to make a word search for their peers. Looking for problematic words in the puzzle might help students remember the sequence of letters. Alternatively, learners could list five to ten words and replace problematic vowels or consonant clusters with blanks. In this case, other students will have to provide the missing letters.

Instructors can experiment with a variety of quizzes. What matters here is good scaffolding. Learners should be presented with a clear example and only then be asked to create a quiz. That is why teachers need to make sure the sample quizzes they are showing are clear and easy to imitate. A successful sample saves time and makes quiz creation less threatening for students.

Activity 4: Crossword Puzzles

Creating crossword puzzles has important benefits. First, learners are exposed to the spelling and definitions of words they have already learned. Second, they focus on the words they would like to review instead of relying on their teacher's choice.

I first challenged my learners to create a crossword puzzle three years ago. The experiment proved to be successful, although somewhat time-consuming at first, and since then I have been using the following steps to encourage my learners to create crossword puzzles at least twice a semester.

a. Show students a sample crossword puzzle. Discuss its structure. This will activate students' schemata and will later help them create a puzzle of their own.

b. Create student pairs or triads. Inform students they will create a crossword puzzle. You will need to explain that they are doing the activity to review the vocabulary they have learned. This might help them feel more positive toward an entirely new task.

c. Have each pair or group write down ten words they have learned. The words should be taken from a textbook learners are using or lessons they have studied. Otherwise, learners might select words that are unfamiliar to their peers, which is both counterproductive and unfair. In any case, students have to understand that one purpose of the puzzle is to help their peers review the vocabulary covered. Walk around to check if students are following your instructions.

d. After students write down the words, give them enough time to draw cells for the letters and write the clues. Walk around and help.

e. Once the puzzles are ready, allow students to check their work. They need to make sure there are no spelling mistakes or missing cells.

f. If possible, photocopy the puzzles so that you can reuse and recycle them, or encourage students to make copies themselves. The photocopies can be used with another class you are teaching and kept for future students.

g. Ask students to exchange crosswords with another pair or triad. Give them enough time to complete the puzzles.

h. Students exchange the puzzles again and check their peers' answers. To make it more fun, you can ask students to give their classmates a mark out of a possible ten points (ten words, with one point given for each correct answer).

i. Students give feedback to those who have completed their puzzle. They sit together and comment on the words selected, the clues, any misunderstandings that occurred, and mistakes their peers may have made.

j. Students might have made mistakes in their puzzles. You might want to collect all their puzzles and provide feedback in the next lesson.

Creating a crossword may be followed by extension activities. For instance, teachers could tell students to choose five words from their crossword and use them in a short text, such as a letter or a story. Learners could also do mini-research on some of the lexical items by exploring their word families, synonyms, and antonyms.

Activity 5: Visuals

Creating a visual seems to lie beyond the limits of an English classroom because learners are not really producing language. However, working on a visual has a number of benefits. Students are preparing a powerful stimulus that generates feelings, reactions, and, more importantly, a desire to express thoughts in the target language. Also, some visual aids assist students in understanding what has been taught (see Hoffman 2003).

Visuals can also help students review. Being a loyal fan of English vocabulary, I am never able to resist the temptation to review the words my students have been learning. In this section I describe a vocabulary review activity that is, in a way, similar to the crossword puzzle presented above. The underlying concept is slightly different, though, because students draw pictures and create posters to visualize lexical items recorded in their vocabulary logs. That is why the activity can be named Visualize the Vocabulary Log. Teachers using the activity for the first time are advised to consult the steps below.

a. Tell students that one way to remember the words in their vocabulary logs is called visualization. To help students understand what you mean, draw a picture of a bone and write the word *bone* inside, or use a drawing and word of your choice.

b. Divide learners into pairs. Give each pair a piece of paper and some pencils or markers. Tell learners they need to visualize ten words in their vocabulary logs. Then they can draw what they want as long as it helps them remember the words. In any case, students also need to write each word and then provide its English definition, its part of speech, and an example sentence of their own. Make sure students write new example sentences and do not copy the ones already written in their logs.

c. Give students enough time to make posters. Monitor and provide support if needed. In fact, watching students work can offer invaluable insights into their creative abilities. For instance, the students I taught last fall were extremely creative. Some drew sophisticated images depicting words like *departure, destination,* and *allowance*. Others adopted a more innovative approach. For example, a group of girls drew a bouquet of tulips: the words and parts of speech were written on the stems, while the definitions were written across the petals.

d. When the posters are ready, ask students to check them for spelling and grammar mistakes. Walk around and help.

e. Put the posters on the classroom walls to share your students' work with their peers and with other classes.

If teachers have time, they can ask students to reflect on the experience. Students can discuss creating vocabulary posters in pairs or write a reflection paper. If students write, they can focus on the challenges they faced and the decisions they made; this feedback will help you next time you do the activity. Making posters helps students explore their own creativity and review vocabulary, and reflection is a way to extend that process. Students can discuss or write about their reasons for choosing certain vocabulary terms, whether the activity helped them retain and use the vocabulary terms, how different pairs represented the same terms, how they can apply the principles of the activity in their future learning, and so on.

INCORPORATING STUDENT-CREATED MATERIALS INTO A COURSE

Using learner-created materials may cause challenges for the teacher. One of them is

making room for such materials within a course or curriculum. The most practical mode of incorporating student-created materials into routine teaching would be the traditional classroom mode. This suggests that teachers need to use student-developed materials during a regular lesson.

Instructors using learner-developed materials for the first time might want to start with a set of three materials. These can be selected according to the skill or subskill teachers would like to reinforce. For instance, students can develop a set of three vocabulary revision exercises. First, students will develop an error-correction exercise requiring their peers to correct spelling mistakes in five vocabulary items they have learned. I suggest starting with this type of exercise because of its familiar format: most students encounter error-correction exercises in the learning materials they are using. Moreover, an exercise like this is not very difficult to develop.

However, students should be given a chance to transition to more challenging materials later in the course. This transition will boost their material-development skills and help them experiment with different formats. As a result, the second activity I would include in the set requires learners to produce a matching exercise based on five words or phrases and their definitions. It is more challenging than the first exercise and exposes learners not only to the spelling but also to the meaning of the vocabulary items they have chosen. The last exercise of the set is a crossword puzzle including about a dozen vocabulary items students have learned. The advantage of this material is that it helps students use higher-level thinking skills, as they have to produce a well-organized network of cells. At the same time, they deal with each vocabulary item in a number of ways. They pay attention to its spelling when drawing the cells and focus on its meaning and part of speech when providing context for the clues. The first exercise of the set can be used after the first two weeks of the course, while the second one should be introduced halfway through the course. The crossword puzzle can serve as a review activity near the end of the course.

Students will not always create perfect materials, but mistakes are a sign they are processing the target language.

Teachers can but do not have to focus on the same skill when selecting materials for their set. To provide more variety, they could ask their learners to create different types of materials. For instance, within one semester or course, learners can create a story starter, a reading quiz, and a vocabulary poster. If there is enough time, teachers can introduce a new activity every week or two or use variations of the same activity. For example, they could first ask students to work on peer-created story starters and then, two weeks later, tell them to write stories based on peer-provided endings.

CONCLUSION

The amount and type of materials learners can create is extensive, and the activities described in this article are merely examples. Teachers are free to adjust them to their context. For instance, they can extend or shorten each activity and come up with their own guidelines and requirements. The outcome of such activities might not always be ideal, so it is important to consider learner-generated materials as a learning opportunity. Students will not always create perfect materials, but mistakes are a sign they are processing the target language. Neither should teachers over-challenge learners. It is important to find the right balance between students' language level and the specific material they are being asked to generate. Teachers should also be ready to face and overcome students' resistance. In more traditional educational contexts, students might not be willing to challenge their traditional role and act like "teachers."

Resistance from the institution is another factor to consider, especially in the case of long-term projects. In many contexts, students are left out of materials development

on the assumption that teachers and textbook authors are the only ones responsible for creating materials. Nevertheless, teachers could use three strategies to get the support of their administration.

First, teachers should share their material-development activities with colleagues they trust. In fact, sharing is vital. By discussing their ideas with other people, teachers basically promote new activities and inspire their colleagues to use them. If several teachers experiment with student-produced materials and find them helpful, the institution might realize that it is a productive use of time. Teachers can present their ideas at a meeting or do a joint presentation on student-created materials whenever there is a professional development event.

Second, conducting research could indicate that student-created materials are beneficial; for example, research on the impact of student-created crossword puzzles on learners' retention of course-specific vocabulary may convince administrators to integrate them into the curriculum. Teachers can choose one type of student-created material and investigate its effect on students' learning. Teachers can also create a questionnaire investigating learners' opinions of activities requiring them to develop materials. If the opinions are positive, the findings may support the claim that student-generated materials motivate learners to improve their English.

Finally, teachers can promote learner-created materials by submitting them to the SAC, if there is one. If the administration sees students benefit from their peers' work, they might encourage more teachers to experiment with learner-developed materials.

The activities presented in this article might seem helpful on paper. However, they will work only if teachers are motivated to try something new in their classroom. The success of any innovation depends on passion. If teachers are passionate about exploring new ways of learning, they will make room for learner-generated materials in spite of the challenges they face every day.

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Encouraging Learners to Create Language-Learning Materials

Student-produced materials are a powerful tool for promoting learner autonomy. They challenge the traditional paradigm of education because the very concept of learner-produced materials is based on trust in the student-centered learning process; when developing materials, learners do not rely on the teacher to make every decision.

Although material-development tasks are typically initiated and guided by the instructor, students are eventually left alone to create and shape their own learning. They brainstorm, plan, and make decisions as well as assess and improve their work. In short, they use their English and critical-thinking skills. The nature of English also changes in such a context: it is not only a language to be learned but also a means of communication to complete a complex task.

In this article, I will highlight the educational value of learner-produced materials and discuss methods to encourage students to create materials. As they do, they review content themselves, provide opportunities for peers to review content and engage in peer learning, and contribute to the collection of stored materials available to other classes and future students. I will also describe a few material-development activities aimed at empowering learners to practice and improve their English.

WHY ENCOURAGE LEARNERS TO CREATE MATERIALS?

Creating materials is an arduous job because it involves a number of challenges. A materials writer has to be creative, competent, and sensitive to his or her educational context. One might argue that most students are not ready to cope with such a heavy load; however, students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Most of them have enough creativity and imagination to deal with tasks that are not within the scope of their classroom routine. At the same time, it would be wrong to challenge students if, in the end, they are not going to develop as language learners. This raises an important question: what are the benefits of learner-generated materials?

One benefit of student-designed materials is that they contribute to peer teaching and learning. For instance, students might facilitate other people's learning by creating and submitting materials to the self-access center (SAC) of their college. According to Malcolm (2004), students in Bahrain were required to submit materials to their SAC as part of their self-directed learning program. The materials designed were mainly worksheets with crosswords, gap fills, multiple-choice exercises, and so on. In addition to submitting materials, the students were requested to evaluate their

peers' contributions to the SAC. Malcolm (2004) states that most student-made activities were useful and appreciated. Yet the evaluation conducted at the end of the academic year revealed that only around a third of the students considered their contributions to the SAC valuable. The author attributes such reaction to the students' deep-rooted belief that they were consumers, not producers, of knowledge, and speculates that some learners might have been annoyed by the extra work imposed on them. Nevertheless, the project offers guidance for teachers interested in involving learners in materials creation.

But teachers should be aware that there are other potential benefits and other types of learner-created materials. For example, developing materials might take students one step further toward better English. Stewart (2010) describes a project carried out with her immigrant students; in an effort to empower her learners to write with *voice*—one's personal and unique way to express thoughts—she asked them to produce a book of stories, essays, and poetry exploring the issue of immigration. Stewart reports that at the end of the project, students felt more motivated to read and write in English as well as use voice in their writing. They also felt they were able to define their identities as immigrants when describing their personal experiences.

Materials creation as a joint endeavor helps learners enjoy one of the key components of collaborative learning: active engagement. According to Maltese (1991), student-created puppet shows and yearbooks featuring the novel *Lord of the Flies* allowed learners not only to read well but also to visualize and experience the reading material.

Student-generated materials also have the potential to encourage students to become more autonomous. Bhattacharya and Chauhan (2010) report on a study in which students were asked to create an individual blog including two articles; the first was an academic assignment derived from their syllabus, and the second explored a niche topic students considered worth discussing. The students sent emails advertising their blogs, commented on one another's blogs, and shared information. The results of the study revealed that blog-assisted language learning can contribute to learner autonomy, as it helps students develop their language and cognitive skills while empowering them to make more informed choices regarding their decisions.

These studies serve as a starting point for instructors interested in incorporating students' materials into their teaching. Since results are limited to the contexts where the studies have been conducted, it is desirable for instructors to do their own research to investigate the effect of student-created materials on students' learning and determine which types of materials are most beneficial for their students to create.

FACILITATING MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Producing materials can be a face-threatening experience for students if they are not trained. Here, training means not only modeling a task for learners, but also creating an atmosphere where designing and sharing materials is a natural extension of everyday learning.

Having experimented with student-created materials for almost three years, I have recorded eight principles to guide myself. These principles are, of course, affected by my own teaching experience in the Omani educational context. However, other teachers might find them transferable to their teaching and learning contexts.

Materials creation as a joint endeavor helps learners enjoy one of the key components of collaborative learning: active engagement.

1. *Believe in students' creativity.* If teachers have basic trust in their class, no matter how unmotivated it seems to be, they should have the courage to train students to complete difficult tasks. This does not presuppose blind trust in students' abilities: teachers have to be aware of the difficulties students face. However, treating students as creative individuals is of great help. To show learners that their creativity is appreciated, teachers could, for instance, read student stories, essays, or poems to the class.

2. *Set a clear goal for each activity.* If teachers decide to review questions in the present simple tense, they can ask students to produce a sentence-scramble exercise including such questions. Establishing a purpose allows students to alert themselves to important information. In addition, it helps teachers use their time in the best possible manner (Fisher and Frey 2011).

3. *Refer students to something familiar.* According to schema theory, past experiences cause people to create mental networks that will eventually help them figure out new experiences (Liu 2012). That is why it is best to ask learners to develop materials similar to those they have seen in textbooks and class handouts.

4. *Let students work on simple tasks first.* Learners need to get into the habit of developing materials. It is desirable that they create simple exercises before doing more demanding and time-consuming tasks. For example, they can start with five-item matching exercises and only then, after completing them, work on more complex projects.

5. *Provide examples.* To visualize their future creations, students should first analyze the content and structure of a similar type of material. For example, they could focus on the words in a sample crossword puzzle and then discuss the direction of cells (across and down) and types of clues (definitions or example sentences).

6. *Give scaffolded feedback.* Scaffolding comprises much more than giving students the right solution to a problem. Teachers lead learners toward solving a proposed problem by hinting at correct answers or giving them advice or information that will enable them to think about the problem (Finn and Metcalfe 2010). Instructors should steer learners in the right direction rather than give a set of dogmatic instructions.

7. *Have students share their work.* Knowing that their materials (e.g., wikis) will be evaluated by their instructor and peers motivates students to invest more effort in their work (Weber 2013). Therefore, learners need an opportunity to share their creations in class or submit them to the instructor for further use.

8. *Store students' materials.* Instructors should create an easily accessible database of the best materials. Having constant access to student-generated materials will help teachers not only supplement their teaching but also model materials production for future students. Such a database will also allow instructors to share students' materials with their colleagues.

Teachers can refer to these principles before asking their learners to develop materials, while the learners are developing the materials, and after learners have finished. In fact, examining these guidelines after students produce a certain material helps teachers reflect on their own performance and look for ways to overcome the challenges students have encountered.

WHAT KINDS OF MATERIALS CAN LEARNERS DEVELOP?

Students can develop a variety of materials ranging from visuals to crossword puzzles.

Ideally, all materials that learners develop should help them become better users of English. In addition, the materials should supplement and support the course(s) learners are taking. For example, medical students can develop their own pronunciation dictionary of medical terms to help themselves articulate the vocabulary items they are learning. Likewise, law students might stage a mock trial that allows them to use legal English in a meaningful context and in the process develop documents, worksheets on useful phrases and procedures, and mock-trial guidelines for future classes. Teachers simply need to choose activities that are useful and potentially interesting for their students.

I usually ask students to work in pairs because pair work gives them better chances to contribute to the final product. The two students are encouraged to share responsibility and work hard, as there is no other person to help. However, teachers might need to divide their students into groups, depending on class size or the type of activity. Working individually is also an option if teachers feel a student can cope on his or her own.

Following are five activities I have used with my elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate learners (18- to 20-year-old university students). They can also be used with students of other ages and levels. For instance, young learners might enjoy creating a word-scramble exercise if they are asked to include the names of colors or animals. I have used these activities during one class period; therefore, they are described in the form of a step-by-step plan to help teachers visualize what they need to do. The activities might last for forty to sixty minutes, depending on students' abilities and level of English.

Activity 1: Student-Produced Text

Instructors can promote learner-centered teaching and learning by asking their students to produce reading material. First of all, student-generated texts might boost learners' motivation. Cloud, Lakin, and Leininger (2011) report that having students create stories about their names and contribute those to a unit compiled by the teachers turned their students into highly motivated learners. Second, students will feel more in control of their own learning when they create their reading material. Another advantage of student-created texts is that they offer valuable insight into students' needs and interests (Chou et al. 2007).

Teachers can adopt two approaches to student-produced text. They can promote traditional sharing (i.e., students read and comment on their peers' essays, stories, poems, blogs, and so on). Alternatively, a learner-created text can serve as a stimulus for another activity. I am in favor of the latter approach because it is related to peer teaching: students produce materials to give their peers an opportunity to improve their English. One such activity allows students to enhance their writing skills by working on *story starters*—the first three to five lines of an incomplete story—produced by their peers, as in the following steps:

a. Conduct a whole-class discussion about what kinds of stories students like to read and write.

b. Explain what a story starter is. Be ready to show students an example if necessary.

c. Inform learners that each of them needs to write a story starter. Emphasize that the story starters need to grab their peers' attention. If you are using story starters to help students review past simple and past progressive, for example, you could first elicit what they know about the formation and usage of these tenses. You can also assign different topics, or students can be asked to create their own scenarios. They can also come up with their own interpretations of the same topic; for instance, they can all write about a scary night (real or fictional), but any topic that fits students' interests and experiences could work. Walk around the class and provide help as needed.

d. After students finish writing, divide them into pairs. Ask them to exchange

their story starters. Tell students to finish their partners' stories. You can make the activity more competitive by telling students that there is a prize for the best story.

e. If there is time, have students read their stories and, if you want, ask the class to vote on their favorite. The pair who has produced the best story can get a small prize. You could also ask students to hand in their stories and, after you read them, you can announce the winner in the next class.

One option is to ask students to read their stories in groups of four. Each student reads his or her story to the group, and the group chooses the best one. Each group then nominates a speaker to read the story to the class. Each student in the group explains why he or she likes the story. Encourage students to say as much as they can; otherwise, they will be tempted to produce simplistic utterances like "I loved it" or "It is interesting." Instead, they can focus on the content (actions and characters described in the story) and language (grammar, vocabulary, and spelling). It is their chance to use English meaningfully while reflecting on a peer's work.

Story starters can be a source of inspiration for teachers and students; they can also enrich other teachers' repertoire of activities. For instance, the best story starters can be compiled in a book and then published. The book could also include the best stories based on students' story starters. Later, the book can be used by the same school or shared with other schools that may be experiencing a shortage of teaching materials.

Quizzes

Most students take quizzes on a regular basis. Why not ask them to design a quiz of their own? This exercise might help them feel their contributions are valued by the teacher. At the same time, students get a chance to review what they have already learned. Activities 2 and 3 provide examples for teachers who would like to encourage their learners to design reading and spelling quizzes.

Activity 2: Reading Quizzes

One thing teachers can do is ask students to write comprehension questions about a reading passage. When writing the questions, students have a chance to process the text by focusing on its main idea and details. In addition, they will learn new vocabulary. To facilitate quiz development, teachers can follow these steps:

a. Mentally, divide your class into pairs before the lesson. Then select two texts (Set A and Set B) from a review unit in the textbook you are using in order to expose students to similar content. If there are no review units, you could select two other texts. If there are 20 students, the first five pairs will get a text from Set A, and the other five will get a text from Set B.

b. Bring the texts to class. Divide students into pairs and distribute the texts.

c. Encourage students to read carefully. They need to understand the text thoroughly in order to write proper questions. Allow them to use dictionaries if they want.

d. After students finish reading, elicit information about two question types: True/False and Wh– questions. Write an example of each on the board. If you are dealing with an advanced class ready to cope with a challenge, include multiple-choice questions as well.

Story starters can be a source of inspiration for teachers and students; they can also enrich other teachers' repertoire of activities.

e. Inform students they need to write at least five questions (depending on the length of the passage) about the text they have read. Emphasize that they can mix different types of questions. For example, they can write two Wh– questions and three True/False questions.

f. When the questions are ready, ask students to exchange their text and questions with a pair that worked with a different text. Provide learners with enough time to read and answer their peers' questions.

g. Students exchange the questions again and check their peers' answers.

h. Allow students to give feedback to their peers. Have them sit with the pair that has answered their questions. Encourage students to refer their peers to the text while giving feedback. The feedback could relate to the questions that were developed by one pair or to the answers given by the other pair.

The teacher could also photocopy a different text for each pair. Another option is to ask everyone to work on the same text. This option will save the teacher preparation time and allow him or her to give feedback on the quality of students' questions.

Activity 3: Spelling Quizzes

Spelling is a major problem for many English learners. To help them master the intricacies of English spelling, I ask them to develop simple spelling quizzes consisting of a word scramble and an error-correction exercise. I have chosen these two exercise types because my students seem to enjoy unscrambling words and correcting spelling mistakes. Other teachers are free to include the items they find suitable. Nevertheless, they could first examine the steps I have described below.

a. Provide students with a sample quiz. You can either write it on the board or make photocopies for your students. If there is an overhead projector in your classroom, you might display the quiz on the screen. You should end up with a quiz like that in Figure 1. You do not have to include the given words in your quiz; however, it is best to provide words your students tend to misspell.

b. Ask students to take the quiz you have provided. This task should not take too much time because there are only two exercises and four items.

c. Divide students into pairs. Tell them they need to create a similar quiz for their peers. Ask them to choose words they normally misspell. They need to include five items in each exercise.

d. Give students enough time to complete their quizzes. Monitor and provide assistance if needed.

e. Tell learners to exchange the quizzes and check their peers' answers. Then select two or three quizzes and read aloud some of the words students have used. Ask individual learners to spell the words. Write them on the board.

An option, if you want students to take multiple quizzes, is to ask each pair to post its quiz on the wall. Allow students to mingle and take as many quizzes as possible. Tell them to write the answers on their own paper; otherwise, the original will become unusable.

Spelling Quiz

1. Unscramble the two words below.
   a. dgsein –
   b. tehri –
2. Correct the spelling errors in the two words below.
   a. becouse –
   b. communicat –

Figure 1. Spelling Quiz

If teachers find spelling quizzes boring, they can tell students to make a word search for their peers. Looking for problematic words in the puzzle might help students remember the sequence of letters. Alternatively, learners could list five to ten words and replace problematic vowels or consonant clusters with blanks. In this case, other students will have to provide the missing letters.

Instructors can experiment with a variety of quizzes. What matters here is good scaffolding. Learners should be presented with a clear example and only then be asked to create a quiz. That is why teachers need to make sure the sample quizzes they are showing are clear and easy to imitate. A successful sample saves time and makes quiz creation less threatening for students.

Activity 4: Crossword Puzzles

Creating crossword puzzles has important benefits. First, learners are exposed to the spelling and definitions of words they have already learned. Second, they focus on the words they would like to review instead of relying on their teacher's choice.

I first challenged my learners to create a crossword puzzle three years ago. The experiment proved to be successful, although somewhat time-consuming at first, and since then I have been using the following steps to encourage my learners to create crossword puzzles at least twice a semester.

a. Show students a sample crossword puzzle. Discuss its structure. This will activate students' schemata and will later help them create a puzzle of their own.

b. Create student pairs or triads. Inform students they will create a crossword puzzle. You will need to explain that they are doing the activity to review the vocabulary they have learned. This might help them feel more positive toward an entirely new task.

c. Have each pair or group write down ten words they have learned. The words should be taken from a textbook learners are using or lessons they have studied. Otherwise, learners might select words that are unfamiliar to their peers, which is both counterproductive and unfair. In any case, students have to understand that one purpose of the puzzle is to help their peers review the vocabulary covered. Walk around to check if students are following your instructions.

d. After students write down the words, give them enough time to draw cells for the letters and write the clues. Walk around and help.

e. Once the puzzles are ready, allow students to check their work. They need to make sure there are no spelling mistakes or missing cells.

f. If possible, photocopy the puzzles so that you can reuse and recycle them, or encourage students to make copies themselves. The photocopies can be used with another class you are teaching and kept for future students.

g. Ask students to exchange crosswords with another pair or triad. Give them enough time to complete the puzzles.

h. Students exchange the puzzles again and check their peers' answers. To make it more fun, you can ask students to give their classmates a mark out of a possible ten points (ten words, with one point given for each correct answer).

i. Students give feedback to those who have completed their puzzle. They sit together and comment on the words selected, the clues, any misunderstandings that occurred, and mistakes their peers may have made.

j. Students might have made mistakes in their puzzles. You might want to collect all their puzzles and provide feedback in the next lesson.

Creating a crossword may be followed by extension activities. For instance, teachers could tell students to choose five words from their crossword and use them in a short text, such as a letter or a story. Learners could also do mini-research on some of the lexical items by exploring their word families, synonyms, and antonyms.

Activity 5: Visuals

Creating a visual seems to lie beyond the limits of an English classroom because learners are not really producing language. However, working on a visual has a number of benefits. Students are preparing a powerful stimulus that generates feelings, reactions, and, more importantly, a desire to express thoughts in the target language. Also, some visual aids assist students in understanding what has been taught (see Hoffman 2003).

Visuals can also help students review. Being a loyal fan of English vocabulary, I am never able to resist the temptation to review the words my students have been learning. In this section I describe a vocabulary review activity that is, in a way, similar to the crossword puzzle presented above. The underlying concept is slightly different, though, because students draw pictures and create posters to visualize lexical items recorded in their vocabulary logs. That is why the activity can be named Visualize the Vocabulary Log. Teachers using the activity for the first time are advised to consult the steps below.

a. Tell students that one way to remember the words in their vocabulary logs is called visualization. To help students understand what you mean, draw a picture of a bone and write the word *bone* inside, or use a drawing and word of your choice.

b. Divide learners into pairs. Give each pair a piece of paper and some pencils or markers. Tell learners they need to visualize ten words in their vocabulary logs. Then they can draw what they want as long as it helps them remember the words. In any case, students also need to write each word and then provide its English definition, its part of speech, and an example sentence of their own. Make sure students write new example sentences and do not copy the ones already written in their logs.

c. Give students enough time to make posters. Monitor and provide support if needed. In fact, watching students work can offer invaluable insights into their creative abilities. For instance, the students I taught last fall were extremely creative. Some drew sophisticated images depicting words like *departure, destination,* and *allowance*. Others adopted a more innovative approach. For example, a group of girls drew a bouquet of tulips: the words and parts of speech were written on the stems, while the definitions were written across the petals.

d. When the posters are ready, ask students to check them for spelling and grammar mistakes. Walk around and help.

e. Put the posters on the classroom walls to share your students' work with their peers and with other classes.

If teachers have time, they can ask students to reflect on the experience. Students can discuss creating vocabulary posters in pairs or write a reflection paper. If students write, they can focus on the challenges they faced and the decisions they made; this feedback will help you next time you do the activity. Making posters helps students explore their own creativity and review vocabulary, and reflection is a way to extend that process. Students can discuss or write about their reasons for choosing certain vocabulary terms, whether the activity helped them retain and use the vocabulary terms, how different pairs represented the same terms, how they can apply the principles of the activity in their future learning, and so on.

INCORPORATING STUDENT-CREATED MATERIALS INTO A COURSE

Using learner-created materials may cause challenges for the teacher. One of them is

making room for such materials within a course or curriculum. The most practical mode of incorporating student-created materials into routine teaching would be the traditional classroom mode. This suggests that teachers need to use student-developed materials during a regular lesson.

Instructors using learner-developed materials for the first time might want to start with a set of three materials. These can be selected according to the skill or subskill teachers would like to reinforce. For instance, students can develop a set of three vocabulary revision exercises. First, students will develop an error-correction exercise requiring their peers to correct spelling mistakes in five vocabulary items they have learned. I suggest starting with this type of exercise because of its familiar format: most students encounter error-correction exercises in the learning materials they are using. Moreover, an exercise like this is not very difficult to develop.

However, students should be given a chance to transition to more challenging materials later in the course. This transition will boost their material-development skills and help them experiment with different formats. As a result, the second activity I would include in the set requires learners to produce a matching exercise based on five words or phrases and their definitions. It is more challenging than the first exercise and exposes learners not only to the spelling but also to the meaning of the vocabulary items they have chosen. The last exercise of the set is a crossword puzzle including about a dozen vocabulary items students have learned. The advantage of this material is that it helps students use higher-level thinking skills, as they have to produce a well-organized network of cells. At the same time, they deal with each vocabulary item in a number of ways. They pay attention to its spelling when drawing the cells and focus on its meaning and part of speech when providing context for the clues. The first exercise of the set can be used after the first two weeks of the course, while the second one should be introduced halfway through the course. The crossword puzzle can serve as a review activity near the end of the course.

Students will not always create perfect materials, but mistakes are a sign they are processing the target language.

Teachers can but do not have to focus on the same skill when selecting materials for their set. To provide more variety, they could ask their learners to create different types of materials. For instance, within one semester or course, learners can create a story starter, a reading quiz, and a vocabulary poster. If there is enough time, teachers can introduce a new activity every week or two or use variations of the same activity. For example, they could first ask students to work on peer-created story starters and then, two weeks later, tell them to write stories based on peer-provided endings.

CONCLUSION

The amount and type of materials learners can create is extensive, and the activities described in this article are merely examples. Teachers are free to adjust them to their context. For instance, they can extend or shorten each activity and come up with their own guidelines and requirements. The outcome of such activities might not always be ideal, so it is important to consider learner-generated materials as a learning opportunity. Students will not always create perfect materials, but mistakes are a sign they are processing the target language. Neither should teachers over-challenge learners. It is important to find the right balance between students' language level and the specific material they are being asked to generate. Teachers should also be ready to face and overcome students' resistance. In more traditional educational contexts, students might not be willing to challenge their traditional role and act like "teachers."

Resistance from the institution is another factor to consider, especially in the case of long-term projects. In many contexts, students are left out of materials development

on the assumption that teachers and textbook authors are the only ones responsible for creating materials. Nevertheless, teachers could use three strategies to get the support of their administration.

First, teachers should share their material-development activities with colleagues they trust. In fact, sharing is vital. By discussing their ideas with other people, teachers basically promote new activities and inspire their colleagues to use them. If several teachers experiment with student-produced materials and find them helpful, the institution might realize that it is a productive use of time. Teachers can present their ideas at a meeting or do a joint presentation on student-created materials whenever there is a professional development event.

Second, conducting research could indicate that student-created materials are beneficial; for example, research on the impact of student-created crossword puzzles on learners' retention of course-specific vocabulary may convince administrators to integrate them into the curriculum. Teachers can choose one type of student-created material and investigate its effect on students' learning. Teachers can also create a questionnaire investigating learners' opinions of activities requiring them to develop materials. If the opinions are positive, the findings may support the claim that student-generated materials motivate learners to improve their English.

Finally, teachers can promote learner-created materials by submitting them to the SAC, if there is one. If the administration sees students benefit from their peers' work, they might encourage more teachers to experiment with learner-developed materials.

The activities presented in this article might seem helpful on paper. However, they will work only if teachers are motivated to try something new in their classroom. The success of any innovation depends on passion. If teachers are passionate about exploring new ways of learning, they will make room for learner-generated materials in spite of the challenges they face every day.

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READER'S GUIDE

This guide is designed to enrich your reading of the articles in this issue. You may choose to read them on your own, taking notes or jotting down answers to the discussion questions below. Or you may use the guide to explore the articles with colleagues.

For example, many teachers discuss *Forum* at regularly scheduled meetings with department colleagues and members of teachers' groups, or in teacher-training courses and workshops. Often, teachers choose an article for their group to read before the meeting or class, then discuss that article when they meet. Teachers have found it helpful to take notes on articles or write a response to an article and bring that response to share in a discussion group. Another idea is for teachers to try a selected activity or technique described in one of the articles, then report back to the group on their experiences and discuss positives, negatives, and possible adaptations for their teaching context.

How Many Words Is a Picture Worth? Integrating Visual Literacy in Language Learning with Photographs
(Pages 2–13)

Pre-Reading

1. Read the quotation by Ansel Adams at the beginning of the article. What do you think it means?
2. What are your favorite ways to use photographs in your class?

Post-Reading

1. By yourself, with a small group of colleagues, or with a class, work through the steps for Strategy 1: Photo Analysis using the cover of this issue of *Forum*. Reflect on how well the process worked and what you would change the next time you perform this activity.
2. The author states, "The way we perceive pictures depends on our existing schema, a product of memories and past experiences unique to each of us. Because interpretation of what we see is subjective, analyzing images provides opportunities for meaningful student-to-student interaction. … challenge students to share the feelings that an image provokes." Find a photograph that you think will be thought-provoking for your students. Then, based on what you have learned in this article about prompting students to analyze photographs, think of several questions for your students on the image you have chosen. Think of questions that will ask students not only to describe and evaluate the photograph, but also to share their feelings with their classmates. When your questions are ready, try them out with your class.

Encouraging Learners to Create Language-Learning Materials (Pages 14–23)

Pre-Reading

1. Do you think it is possible for students to create their own language-learning materials and activities? What might be the benefit of having students do this?

2. How do you define learner autonomy? How do you try to encourage it in your classroom?

Post-Reading

1. In the "Facilitating materials development" section, the author discusses eight principles. Which do you think might pose a challenge for you when having your students develop materials? Can you suggest any other principles you think would be necessary for doing this in your classroom?

2. Imagine you are going to have your students produce their own materials for the first time. How would you explain the concept to your students? Which technique from this article would you start with? What would you tell students reluctant to do this because they are worried about an upcoming exam?

Listening Cloze Meets Info-Gap: A Hybrid Activity to Exploit Listening Materials (Pages 24–32)

Pre-Reading

1. Have you ever used cloze (fill-in-the-blank) activities when teaching listening? What did your students think of these activities?

2. Are you familiar with information-gap activities? If so, have you used them in your classroom?

Post-Reading

1. The author says, "One way to integrate as many skills as possible is to combine different activities. Integrating skills is simply approaching real life and real language use. In other words, if you want to be a good speaker, you should be a good listener as well … ." How have you integrated the teaching of speaking and listening in your class? Do you think any of the listening activities you have done helped make your students better speakers?

2. For putting the listening cloze info-gap activity into practice, the author suggests using radio broadcasts, podcasts, or songs. Can you think of any specific examples of these that would work well with your students?

Using "Storybird" in Young Learners' Creative Writing Class

by LAURA GIACOMINI

Major changes in technology have had an influence on education. Teachers cannot neglect the impact of new technologies and fail to incorporate them in their teaching practice because that would not cater to many students' needs. Ignoring technological advances would also entail not benefiting from an array of online teaching resources and academic material. The question that arises then is: why not make use of the tools at our fingertips?

I reflected upon my own teaching practice and decided it was time I tried something innovative in my classes. I have been exploring different online tools and have chosen Storybird as part of the new media to exploit in creative writing lessons. In this article, I will share the experience of using this website (www.storybird.com) in the classes I teach and describe the effect it had on learners' writing process.

The first step is to explore the online tool yourself. I accessed the website and made sure I had a good command of it before presenting it to students. What I found interesting about Storybird is that it combines art and writing. You are provided with works of art presented in sequence as if they were part of the plot of a story. However, you decide which images to choose, how to order them, and what story you want to tell. That is, after choosing some artwork, you can start writing your story. The site gives you the options of writing a long-form book, a poem, or a picture book.

Before taking the idea into the classroom, I created two Storybird class accounts, one for each of the groups of students I teach. The rationale for doing this is that each of the class accounts is private; only the teacher and the students in that class can read what their classmates have written once they have published it. No outsider has access to the account or can contact the students. To protect students' privacy, it is best to have one account per group and not to mix the virtual classrooms.

GETTING STARTED

After writing a Storybird text myself, I showed it to students to give them an idea of what they were going to work on. I then guided them in logging in to their own accounts with the usernames and passwords provided by the site. Students had to change this original password; information about that was on a card I put in their communication notebooks so that parents had access to it.

The students were genuinely enthusiastic about using the website, and they were ready to take an active role in this new writing endeavor. Thanks to the online tutorials and myriad tools the Internet presents, it was not difficult to utilize Storybird.

To sustain students' enthusiasm, I decided not to grade their first Storybird assignment and requested that they write a ten-page picture book based on the artwork that inspired them the most. I even included a tutorial to foster their autonomy. It was highly rewarding to see how seriously students took this new project. This motivation to write a narrative story was translated into motivation to use English because the students were putting into words their creative ideas. Not only did they learn new vocabulary items and grammar structures, but they also recycled ones they knew.

The students wrote their first Storybird story at school. It took them three sessions to complete the assignment. When some of them finished early, they asked me if they could write another story using the website while their classmates concluded their tasks. On no account does this happen when they are writing on paper; once they finish a piece of writing, I encourage revision, and when they finish that, they hand in their papers and then do something else. They never ask to continue writing.

After using Storybird, some of them even inquired if they could write in Spanish, their L1. Because they had already complied with the tasks I had assigned in English, I thought they should be allowed to write in their L1 because they had an inner drive to do so. When I informed coworkers and the school authorities about the outcome of using Storybird, they were delighted. One of them even witnessed how, as I came into the classroom and greeted the students, they asked me when they were going to use Storybird again. This was motivating, both for my students and for me.

ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT

The second assignment was more guided and had a different objective. This time, the students wrote about personal experiences. They used Storybird while making meaningful connections and using certain language structures they had already learnt. In this case, they were asked to write a story using any artwork tagged "snow." Although teachers should use tags that are appropriate for their context and for students' experiences, I gave my students the option to invent part of the story, or all of it, in case some of them did not wish to share details about something that really happened to them. For instance, they could write about their winter holidays or their recent visit to Chile on a

cultural and educational exchange program. Their work had to have a minimum of ten pages and a maximum of 20 pages. In addition, they had to use appropriate tenses and at least five vocabulary items they had learnt, and they also had to include reported speech (which they had recently studied) at least once. (Of course, other teachers might change these requirements, as appropriate.) The impact of this activity was remarkable. The students were so enthusiastic about this task that some of them willingly stayed during break time to finish their stories, even when I was not around.

My role in this project was that of facilitator—going around to see if students needed help with the website or with how to express certain ideas in English. However, students were helping each other and did not rely solely on my assistance to advance their writing. Having a more powerful, active, and autonomous role has rendered students more confident when using English. And besides writing their own narratives in English, students read the ones published on the website, getting additional exposure to the language.

REFLECTIONS

In my teaching practice, I do not follow a specific method; rather, I use a combination of strategies I find enriching and successful. By employing Storybird as one more tool for teaching creative writing in English language class, I made an effort to maximize learning opportunities through meaningful learner involvement. Students were not only highly motivated to write in English by means of a technological device, but they were also in control of their learning experience.

In order to benefit from the use of Storybird, I had to feel comfortable with the website and ensure we had the necessary elements to accomplish the tasks—that is, the right connectivity and one netbook per student. Bringing technology into the classroom may not be a viable idea for all teachers due to the fact that technical glitches may arise and that some teachers may not be as computer-literate as their students. Nevertheless, it is a sound decision to overcome certain fears and undertake the challenge of innovation in your classes not only for your students' benefit but also for your own. The students' engagement with the task motivated me even further to maintain these sorts of practices because it also compelled me to learn something new and continue growing as a professional.

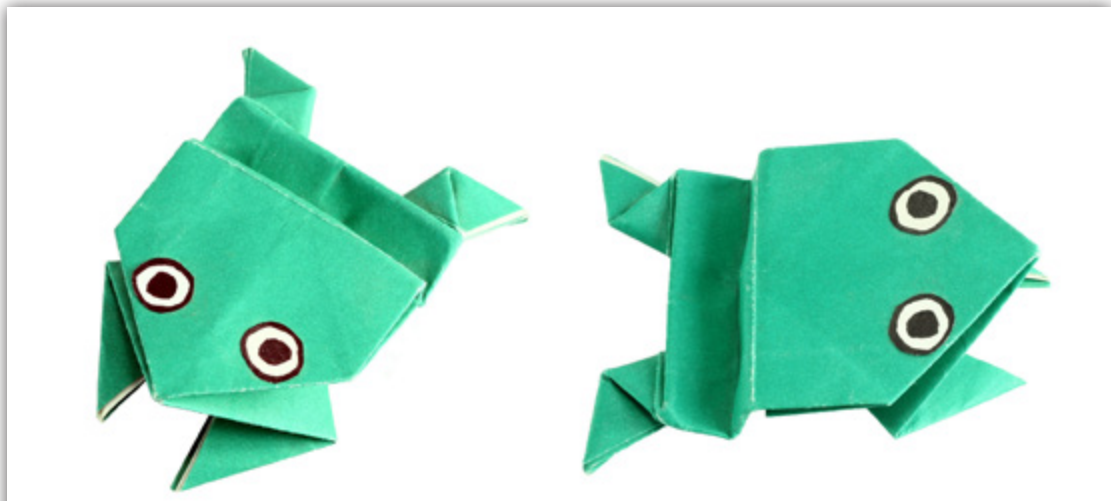
Laura Giacomini is from Argentina. She has been teaching English as a foreign language for ten years in a variety of contexts. She holds a BA in English Language Teaching and is working toward an MA in English Literature.

Running for Your Words!

by LAURA LODER BÜCHEL

In Swiss schools, English language textbooks for eight- to thirteen-year-old children contain many arts-and-crafts and science-experiment lessons with a focus on following simple instructions. An example of one is making an origami frog (*First Choice—Animals* activity book). The language is most commonly accompanied by a picture for each step, as in these examples:

- Fold a square piece of paper in half. [with a picture]
- Finally, make your frog hop. [with a picture]



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Origami frogs

The recommendation in the teacher's notes is to simply pre-teach the vocabulary, read the text out loud, and then let the learners do the activity (making the object or carrying out the described steps). Unfortunately, in the lessons I've observed, learners tend to stick to their mother tongue or work independently in carrying out the task, as there is no real reason to communicate. There is also no need to understand the written text because the steps are accompanied by pictures and are presented in order.

To make these fun activities more conducive to communication, I have folded paper frogs and worked with recipes and www.wikihow.com successfully over the years in a slightly different way than mentioned in our textbook's notes for teachers. The following example activity is for beginners, after perhaps a year of English (two to three lessons a week), but it can be adapted for different levels.

PREPARATION

1. Copy the instructions onto strips of paper, with each line on a separate strip of paper, like this:

   - *Fold a square piece of paper in half.*
   - *Fold it in half again.*

   A scanner mouse can save you time, but writing the text by hand or typing it in also works. If you leave in the step numbers on the strips of paper, it simplifies the task later, which might be useful for younger learners. For older learners, I would take off the numbers.

2. Hide the strips around the room (on backs of chairs, up high but accessible).

3. Prepare a gap fill for the learners with the same language as the instructions you are working from. I suggest preparing two gap fills, one with fewer gaps for the less-confident learners and another with more gaps or more difficult gapped words for the stronger learners. Here is an example of one sentence from each:

   - *Learner A:* _____ *a square* _____ *of paper in half.*
   - *Learner B:* _____ *a* _____ *piece of paper in* _____.

   In the gap fill, the steps can be in the right order or out of order, with numbers or without numbers. Make these decisions based on how much support your students need.

4. Have new vocabulary words on the board (here *fold*, *edge*, *corners*, and other non-cognates).

LESSON

1. Pre-teach the vocabulary on the board. Make sure learners see and say the words. With more advanced students, I erase the words after the introduction.

2. Form pairs and hand out an appropriate gap fill to each learner (with the stronger learners getting the version with more gaps).

3. Model the following instructions:

   - *Work in pairs.*
   - *One person gets up, walks around, and finds a sentence. Memorize it! Say it three times to yourself. Move your lips, but don't talk.*
   - *Walk back to your partner. Say the sentence out loud to your partner. Both of you find the sentence in the gap fill. Then write the missing words in the gaps.*
   - *Take turns. Now your partner gets up and finds a different sentence and does the same thing.*

4. Learners repeat Step 3 until the gaps are complete and both partners have the completed text. Then, they have to figure out what order the steps should be in to make a paper frog. This requires language such as "I think this comes first," which you might want to write on the board. For beginners, this may be too difficult, so leave the numbers on the cut-up strips of paper with a gap for the number (so that students practice saying the numbers), or leave the text in the right order.

5. In pairs, learners can read the instructions out loud together to internalize the language. They can also swap papers with another pair to peer-correct spelling. With beginners, I often do a choral drill with the steps and then let learners read them again in pairs.

6. Learners can now follow the instructions—in this case, they will fold the paper frogs. As they are folding their frogs, I tell them to chant the steps out loud as they work. Sometimes I say, "Chant it 20 times; then you can talk to your neighbor," and this often leads them to try speaking exclusively in English for the entire lesson.

7. After they have done the exercise, they can open their books. This example lends itself to a discussion about the use of the imperative.

Over the years, I have done this sort of running dictation gap fill for any pages where there is perhaps too much support, when I feel the learners need to internalize the language more, or as an assessment of the language I think they should know. I find it has helped my learners to remember language better because they have to get up and say the English over and over again to themselves before they say it to someone else, so it increases their contact time with the target language. Depending on how long the text is, or what is analyzed afterwards, this technique can take anywhere from 20 minutes to an entire class period.

Furthermore, this running dictation activity works just as well for any basic gap fill activity you are working on. For example, if the learners are given a cloze text with the lyrics of a song, and the text is cut up and posted around the room, the learners can listen and put the lyrics in order. Often, hiding the strips of paper adds an element of fun. Enjoy!

Laura Loder Büchel, PhD, is a teacher trainer at the Zürich University of Teacher Education.

Beat the Clock: Building Oral Language Skills in English Language Classrooms

by ALEXIS CULLERTON AND INÉS TORRES DE MUÑOZ

The lack of oral language in the classroom, combined with our students' lack of confidence speaking with native English speakers, encouraged us to develop a simple technique to increase speaking in the classroom. This original technique, "Beat the Clock," encourages students to speak in English and increase their oral proficiency at the same time.

Beat the Clock is a simple technique. The only material needed is a timer. The technique can be used with English language learners at every age and ability level, and teachers decide the length of time for the activity. We have successfully used this technique with both large (up to 15 students) and small (five students) groups. When deciding upon a large- or small-group application of this technique, consider the following: (1) the desired number of talking turns per student, (2) the comfort level of students, (3) the students' knowledge of the topic, and (4) student personalities.

The technique was developed to address low levels of oral English by challenging our students to orally summarize the lesson on their own. The first minute of student talk was a little awkward, and the flow of

conversation was somewhat choppy, but students were able to talk among themselves in English for five minutes. As a class, we named the technique "Beat the Clock," and we now use it often.

BEAT THE CLOCK— AN ORAL LANGUAGE CHALLENGE

The procedure for carrying out the technique is as follows:

1. Lead a prompt, which may review or expand upon the main themes in the lesson.
2. Set a timer to a desired amount of time (start with fewer minutes and increase).
3. Review the rules.
4. Start the timer when students begin speaking, stopping it early only if they break the rules.
5. Record the number of minutes that students were able to speak. Increase time expectation each time you use the technique. For example, if you set the expectation at two minutes the first time, and students meet that goal, set the timer for three minutes the next time.

When you are ready to use the technique, you can begin by giving students a prompt relevant to the content they have been studying, or you might ask them, "What are the main takeaways from today's lesson?" After they have suggested a few ideas, you can continue: "I will set the timer to two minutes. Everyone must participate in the conversation. I will not interrupt you unless you break the rules. Remember, you must continue the discussion for two minutes."

Optional: If students "beat the clock" and are able to speak for the allocated amount of time, they may receive a reward. If the students are *not* able to speak for the entire time or break the rules, they do not receive a reward and may have to start over.

BEAT THE CLOCK RULES

1. All students must participate equally (the teacher keeps track of participation by marking a point on the board or on a piece of paper every time a student speaks).
2. The teacher is not allowed to correct students.
3. The teacher is allowed to interrupt only if the rules have been broken.
4. Students must stay on topic.
5. Conversation can start with a student asking questions, but the aim of the activity is for students to engage in a natural group discussion about a topic.

HELPFUL HINTS TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS

- Instead of answering questions with *yes* or *no*, explain your answer.
- Try to build on the idea discussed by the person before you so the conversation progresses naturally.
- Keep track of who is participating and engage people who are not participating equally. Discuss areas of the topic that you want to know more about, that you don't understand, or that you think are interesting.
- Use personal stories and examples if they are on topic.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Enjoy yourself!

USING THE TECHNIQUE: IT TAKES TIME

This technique is extremely beneficial over time, but be aware that the first time you use it in the classroom can prove challenging. The

technique takes students out of their comfort zones. At first, conversation might not have a natural flow, and students might forget vocabulary words or get nervous because of the pressure of the clock.

BENEFITS OF THE TECHNIQUE

In the months since we started using this technique with our students, we have noticed many changes in the classroom. We have observed our students gaining confidence and participating in more natural and authentic conversations. This technique has encouraged some of our most shy students to express themselves and, in turn, helped them acclimate to their environment. Moreover, students are excited when they reach another minute and keep track of the Beat the Clock minutes with enthusiasm. We have even observed students taking notes during class on ideas they might want to include in their conversation. We have begun using Beat the Clock every Friday so that students expect it and look forward to it.

When participating in the Beat the Clock technique, students can speak openly and do not have to worry about being corrected, which has come as an added bonus. This, in and of itself, is a welcome opportunity in any language classroom and helps build confidence for oral language, without fear of embarrassment.

Additionally, this technique has served as an excellent informal assessment of oral language and a means of checking for understanding. It has helped develop relationships in the classroom and increased oral language and speaking skills. As time progresses, we find ourselves evolving with the technique and creating a more authentic learning environment to support oral language skills.

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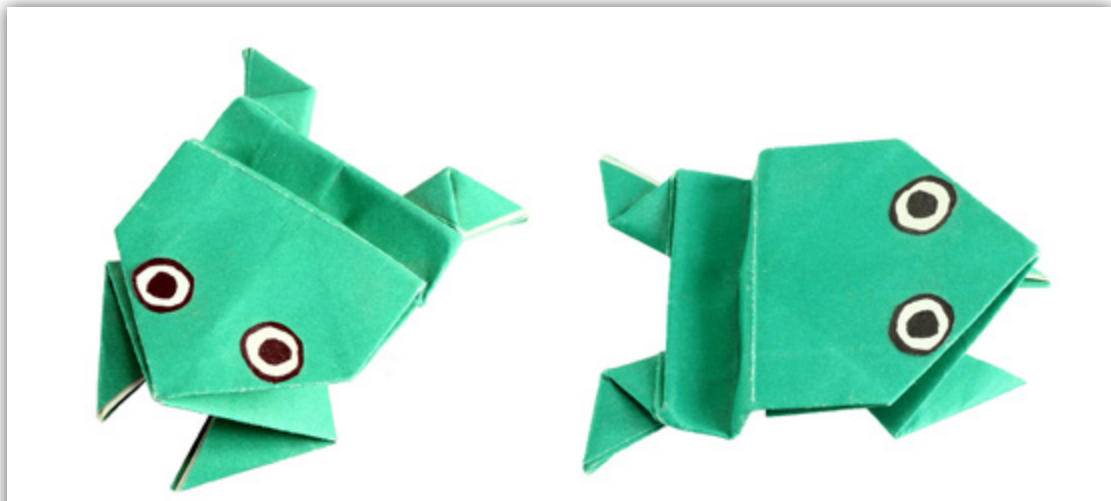

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MY CLASSROOM ETHIOPIA

Dawit Negeri has been teaching in the English Department at Ambo University for the past five years. With a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Mr. Negeri is familiar with the subject, using his knowledge to share with students the importance of acquiring this global language.

Dawit Negeri at the podium in his classroom

Photo by Eve Smith

The entrance to Ambo University

With about 30 hours of actual classroom time per week, Mr. Negeri divides his attention between three separate sets of learners. The first is non–English majors who are required to take "Common Course" English classes, as English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopia's higher-education system. For this group, Mr. Negeri teaches Basic Writing Skills, a class that all undergraduate students must take, regardless of their majors and English ability.

Mr. Negeri also teaches in the U.S. Department of State's English Access Microscholarship Program, working with local high school students on Saturday mornings through innovative and engaging teaching practices. Begun at Ambo University in 2014 through a partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, the Access Program is a practice in sustainable education designed to make students entering the tertiary system more comfortable with English and more skilled at using it.

But Mr. Negeri's main teaching focus is on the university classes of English majors he instructs in the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Of his overall teaching workload, he said, "It is a lot of different approaches to the same topic, but I enjoy the variation it provides me with as a teacher."

It was during his younger years that Mr. Negeri knew he wanted to be an English teacher. Encounters with missionaries in his Western Ethiopian hometown of Gimbi—where he met his wife, Ababo, now an English teacher in an Ambo high

The opportunity to teach a variety of classes allows Mr. Negeri to experiment in one class while refining in another.

school—along with a strong desire to help others, brought him to this early conclusion. Whenever he was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Mr. Negeri never hesitated with his answer. Now, years later, he says, "When I graduated with my master's degree, I remember calling up my elementary school teacher and telling him that I was now an English instructor at Ambo University. He said he couldn't believe it, but of course was proud of me."

In Ethiopia, students do not choose the major they study or the university they attend because a government directive fills the needs of development through individualized placements into particular tracks. For motivated teachers such as Mr. Negeri, this is viewed as an opportunity, not as a limitation. During his time at Ambo University, he has taught a variety of classes, from Advanced Speech to Basic Writing, and from Comprehensive Reading to Introductory Listening. But a common theme that permeates the disciplines he teaches is his dedication to both the students and the materials, as he makes every effort to correlate the two through progressive pedagogy and modern methodology.

Located in the heart of the Ambo University campus is Classroom #41, where each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Mr. Negeri and his English-major students meet for a two-hour session. The room comfortably holds about 30 students, but his class is crowded with the 41 on the roster. On most days the room is hot, with windows that open but unfortunately face towards laundry and cooking facilities, which emit steam that seemingly affects all five senses. At the front of the classroom, however, is

Main road of the Ambo University campus

Mr. Negeri, eager for the day's lesson. He brings a variety of his own materials to share with students, although the classroom is equipped with only a dry-erase marker and a whiteboard.

The opportunity to teach a variety of classes allows Mr. Negeri to experiment in one while refining in another. For example, he likes to experiment with idioms, which he uses to get students to think as they enter early for their classes. He writes an idiom on the board and has students come up with possible meanings as they settle in for the day's lesson. For the English majors he teaches, he expands upon this practice, asking students to use the idiom themselves either in speech or in writing, incorporating it into their exercises and making it their own. He said, "To college students, outright games may seem a bit elementary, but if you can make something fun without the label of a 'game,' then it goes to liven up the class a bit." Mr. Negeri fully understands the effect of fun and engaging activities in a class that many students did not willingly choose to enroll in, as well as one with limited resources and support. Simple things like creating enjoyable lessons about idioms go a long way in a classroom that has no books, computers, or connectivity.

Electricity is unreliable in Ambo, so generators at the university are running most of the time during the day. This does not directly affect the light in a classroom, which has an entire wall of windows. But providing materials for the students can be difficult; rarely are copies handed out, and the use of computers is virtually nonexistent. Explaining how he copes, Mr. Negeri said, "It was the same case when I was a student, so I am accustomed to what many Westerners would view as limitations, having to constantly figure out work-around solutions to keep my students engaged while following the prescribed curriculum." Mr. Negeri uses other techniques such as varying the seating arrangements and using group-pairing to incorporate constructive teaching practices, having the students take charge of their learning environment and not fall victim to the limited infrastructure.

Within the English Department as a whole, there are many fewer women than men: only two instructors out of 40 are female, and there are many more male students than female students. Taking these numbers into account, Mr. Negeri often arranges his classes in groups, with at least one female student in each group. Eight women in a class of 41

The library at Ambo University

would suggest an imbalance in participation, but through the group arrangement, Mr. Negeri has found that the female student in each group frequently speaks more than her male counterparts.

Mr. Negeri described a recent lesson he taught in which a foundation of introductions gradually elevated to simple conversation. Role-playing partners (one male and one female) first practiced casual greetings with one another in front of the class—for example, strangers passing on the street or long-lost friends reuniting. As the class progressed, the groups turned from two members to four, with expanded dialogue between participants—two couples on a date or family members sharing a walk. Mr. Negeri said that "having the students speak in front of their peers creates authentic learning practices so that others can hear the level of their classmates, not simply comparing themselves with my ability, which may be viewed as much stronger." This practice also doubles as a public speaking opportunity, as most of the speaking in typical classes in Ethiopia is limited to teacher-student/question-answer dialogue that does not truly foster sustainable language development.

Because Mr. Negeri teaches such a variety of classes, he rarely gets the chance to teach students in consecutive years and therefore is not able to observe their growth in English. Within the rural landscape of Ambo, there is little practical use for English outside the classroom, making English classes that much more valuable for students' language development. Mr. Negeri said, "I wish I could see the progression which takes place, but for my scheduling, it is difficult to see my former students after I have taught them." With a tight-knit group of teachers in the department who can be viewed more as friends than as colleagues, he is able to get sporadic updates on former students. But he still wishes he could reunite with them in an academic setting, able to capitalize on their language development, which he helped to strengthen.

A sustainable future lies in the education of my people.

The teaching and learning environment within Ethiopia, and especially at Ambo University, can be described as challenging. The country is in a developmental phase that has seen the number of universities jump from three to thirty-three in a ten-year span. With such rapid growth, the infrastructure is lacking in some areas, but motivated teachers—including Mr. Negeri—are moving education in a positive direction. They are using the tools they learned in similar settings years ago to process solutions rather than dwell on adversities.

Asked about his future plans, Mr. Negeri sticks to this optimistic narrative, still following that vision from the time when he was a fourth-grader hoping to achieve that which he now practices. And his dream endures. He said, "I hope to continue my own education and obtain a PhD so that I will continue to be able to help my country through teaching, knowing that a sustainable future lies in the education of my people."

This article was written by **Matthew Jellick**, an English Language Fellow teaching in Ethiopia. He completed his first year at Ambo University and has returned to Ethiopia for a second year, at Dire Dawa University. You can follow his path @MJellick.

Photos by Matthew Jellick

Note: To learn more about the English Access Microscholarship Program (mentioned on page 44), go to: exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/english-access-microscholarship-program

TRY THIS

All in the Family Photo

LEVEL: Beginner and Upper Beginner

TIME REQUIRED: 30–45 minutes

GOALS: To use vocabulary about family members; to practice using basic pronouns and comparative and superlative adjectives; to write sentences about and talk about family members

MATERIALS: Chalk and blackboard, or markers and whiteboard or poster paper; pencils and paper; glue or tape; family photos or sketches (each student brings one to class)

OVERVIEW: This activity can build community and relationships in the classroom, especially at the beginning of a school year or semester. Students will use family photos in writing and speaking exercises to practice using family vocabulary, numbers, basic pronouns, and comparative and superlative adjectives. Students should be familiar with these concepts before they do this activity. Ideally, students will bring in printed photos of their families, but photos on mobile devices or drawings of families could be used. Each student will list family members or label them in a photo or drawing, write basic sentences about each person, and tell others about the family members. The activity can be adapted for different proficiency levels, even within the same class.

PREPARATION:

1. About a week before you plan to begin the activity, tell students that they will need to bring in a photograph of their family by a specific date—the date you will begin the activity. Telling students about this activity at least one week in advance gives them time to find a photo or take one if they need to. Bringing in your own family photo, posting it on the board, and reminding students about the upcoming activity each day will help.

   Ideally, photos would be printed so that students can mount them on paper. If students have no photograph, have them draw a picture of their family. If students have pictures on a mobile device, they should make a sketch of a family photo, recreating it with stick figures. They can show the real photo during the activity when they tell their classmates about their family.

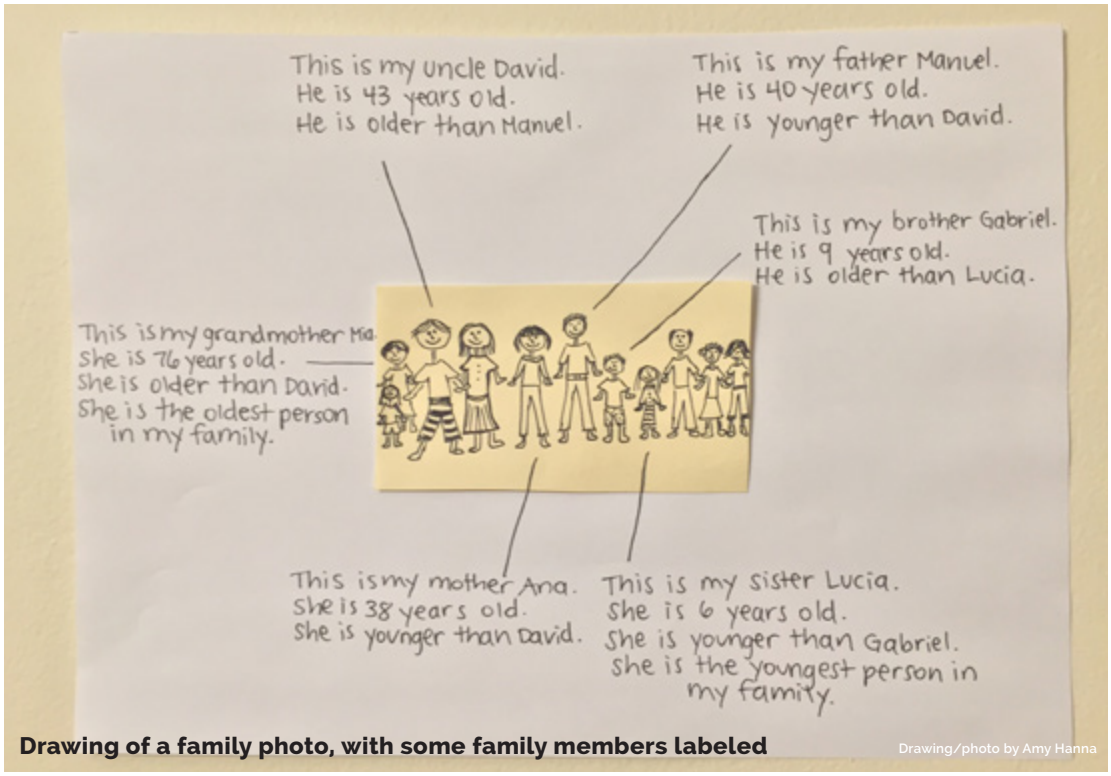
2. Gather one piece of large paper per student, glue or tape, pencils, chalk or markers, and your own family photo.

3. Glue or tape your family photo to the center of a piece of paper, leaving space surrounding the picture for your writing.

4. Review vocabulary related to family members, the numbers 1 to 100, and pronouns to be sure students understand the concepts needed for the activity. If your students are ready, you can also review comparative adjectives (in this activity, *older* and *younger*) and superlative adjectives (*oldest* and *youngest*).

PROCEDURES:

1. Tell students they will use their family photographs and vocabulary to write and talk about their own families. Ask them to help you generate a list of family members



Drawing of a family photo, with some family members labeled Drawing/photo by Amy Hanna

and relatives, and write their suggestions on the board or chart paper. Family members on the list could include the following:

mother
father
sister
brother
aunt
uncle
cousin
niece
nephew
grandmother
grandfather
great grandmother
great grandfather
sister-in-law
brother-in-law

2. Display your own family photo, mounted on the center of a sheet of paper. Tell students to imagine they are shopping with someone from their family, perhaps a sibling or parent, and they meet a classmate at the market or store. What would they say to introduce their family member to the classmate? You may want to ask, "How do you introduce your family member to your friend? What do you say to your friend?"

3. Depending on your students' responses, you may need to explain that when people talk about their family, they can use the sentence frame "This is my _____ [name]" to tell about their relationship to someone and to give that person's name. Examples are "This is my cousin Judy" or "This is my brother Marcello." Write this sentence frame on the board near the list of family members if you think students will need to refer to it.

4. Using your family photo, the sentence frame "This is my _____ [name]," and the list of family members the class has created, label each of your family members in the space surrounding the photo. You may want to draw a line to each of the people pictured and leave enough space to add a few short sentences about them. If your class is large, you might want to recreate your photo on the board so that all students can see what you are doing.

Draw a large, quick sketch of the photo, even using stick figures, to help the class understand what you are doing as you model the activity for them.

5. Tell students that they can give more information about their family by talking about each person's age and that they can do so by using the sentence frame "He/She is ____ years old." You can write this on the board as well if it will help your students. Model adding this sentence to tell more about each of the family members in your photo.

6. Hand out the paper, glue or tape, and pencils to students. Give them time to mount their photos or drawings, label each family member, and write each person's age. While the class is working, circulate throughout the room to assist students as needed. You may want to tell students with very large families to label a limited number of family members for this activity if time becomes an issue.

7. Explain to students that they can also add comparisons about the ages of their family members. Choose two of your family members and tell the class their ages. For example, you might say, "My sister Fatima is 27 years old, and my cousin Maryan is 16 years old." Then you could ask, "How can I compare the ages of Fatima and Maryan?" or other questions that will prompt students to use the comparative adjectives *older* and *younger*.

8. Model adding sentences with comparative adjectives about age to your family photo, writing "He/She is older than _____" or "He/She is younger than _____." For example, where you have labeled your sister "Fatima" and given her age, you can add, "She is older than Maryan," or with Maryan's information you can write, "She is younger than Fatima." If your students need the support, you can write the sentence frames on the board as well.

9. Give students time to add comparative sentences about the ages of their family members on the paper around their family photos or sketches.

10. Find the oldest member of your family (without actually telling students that person is the oldest). Explain that the person has been alive for more years than anyone else in the family and ask, "How could I use the word *old* to tell that this person has been alive the longest?" or "How can I compare the age of this person to the age of everyone else in my family?" You are trying to elicit the word *oldest* from your students. You can add the sentence "He/She is the oldest person in my family" to your family photo.

11. Repeat the process in Step 10 for the youngest person in your photo, explaining that the person has been alive for fewer years than anyone else in your family; try to elicit the word *youngest* from your students. Then, add the sentence "He/She is the youngest person in my family" to your family photo. You can write this sentence frame on the board if you think your students will need to refer to it to complete their own writing.

12. Tell students that they will introduce their family to a group of classmates, and they will listen to learn about other students' families. Model the introductions by using your own family photograph and saying, "This is my family" before sharing more information about each member. For example, you can use your photograph and the sentences you have written and say, "This is my mother, Marisol. She is 59 years old. She is younger than my Uncle Frederico." You can also remind students to display their mounted photos, mobile phones, or papers where others can see them, not facing away from the audience. Help them remember to speak to the group and not down to their papers.

13. Give students time to practice their introductions before they get into small groups to share information about their families. You might say something

like, "I am going to give everyone five minutes to practice what you will share with your group. You can use your writing to help you remember what to say. Practice speaking clearly and loudly so that others in the group can hear you. Remember to be sure others can see your photo while you are speaking."

14. Divide the class into groups of three or four students. You can use any method to group the students, but keeping the groups small will keep students on task and engaged in the activity.

15. Explain the task. You can say, "You will show your photo to your group and talk about the people in your family. When you talk, speak loudly and clearly because many people in the room will be speaking at the same time. Make sure everyone in your group has time to share, and make sure that you listen when others speak." If your class needs specific instructions, you may want to suggest a strategy for deciding the order of presentations within the group, such as by alphabetical order of the group members' names, by family size (smallest to largest), or by birthday month.

16. Tell the students to start sharing in their groups. While they are sharing information about their families, you can move around the room and listen to their introductions. Pay special attention to what students are doing well and to common mistakes you notice. You might want to write these down on a notepad so that you can provide feedback at the end of the activity. If you want to, you can mix up the groups and repeat this activity multiple times. This will give students a chance to discuss their families with more of their classmates and to get more practice using and listening to the language structures.

17. Once your class has finished sharing, you can post students' family photos or sketches in the classroom to give everyone a chance to continue learning about each other's families.

VARIATIONS

1. Students could be paired and be responsible for introducing their partner and presenting facts about his or her family to the class. This will build community and help students learn more about each other. Depending on what information you have students include, the following sentence frames could be provided as support if needed:

   - This is [partner's name].
   - He/She has ____ brothers and ____ sisters.
   - He/She has ____ cousins/aunts/uncles.
   - The oldest person in his/her family is ____. He/She is ____ years old.
   - The youngest person in his/her family is ____. He/She is ____ years old.

2. As part of the presentation, you could also challenge each set of partners to make comparisons between their families by using language such as "My sister is older than his/her brother" or "My father is younger than his/her father."

3. If you prefer not to have students present to the class, you can still ask partners to compare their families. Instead of sharing the information orally, partners could write comparative sentences and submit them as an assignment.

EXTENSIONS

1. Many vocabulary terms and language structures can be practiced with this activity. If your class is learning about hobbies, students can write and talk about the things their family members like to do by using the sentence frame "He/She likes to _____" and adding verbs such as *read*, *paint*, *dance*, *play*, *sew*, and *garden*. Students could also include something they like to do with each of their family members by

saying, "I like to _____ with my _____" (for example, "I like to draw pictures with my cousin"). If the class is learning about describing physical characteristics, students could add information about their family members' heights, eye color, and hair color by saying, "He/She is _____ (tall/short). He/She has _____ (brown/green/blue) eyes and _____ (black/brown/blond) hair." If students are learning about personality traits, they could add a description of each family member, saying, "He/She is _____" and using words like *funny*, *caring*, *helpful*, and *stubborn*.

2. Students could interview one of their family members and then provide an in-depth profile of that person. The class could generate the interview questions, or you could use the suggested questions below. If students do not have a family member who speaks English, they can ask the questions in their native language and then use the information to develop the profile in English. Questions could include the following:

   - When is your birthday?
   - Where were you born?
   - What are your favorite foods?
   - What do you enjoy doing as a hobby?
   - Did you go to a university? If yes, what did you study?
   - Where do you work? What do you do?
   - What do you think is one of the best qualities of our family?

   After students have interviewed someone, you can have them write a paragraph about their family member and/or present a summary of their interview to the class or a small group. To help students with their writing or the presentation, you might want to use these sentence frames:

   This is my _____. His/Her name is _____. His/Her birthday is _____, and he/she was born in _____. He/She likes to eat _____. His/Her hobby is _____. He/She works at _____ and is a/an _____. He/She went to _____ University and studied _____. He/She thinks our family is _____.

SCAFFOLDING

1. Though this activity is designed for beginners, it can be adapted to meet the needs of students at different proficiency levels within a classroom or across different classes. More advanced students could be given flexibility in the writing portion if you simply provide them with a list of what they need to include such as name, family relationship (to the student), age, and comparison to others' ages in the family. Students could also give information about family members' hobbies, occupations, educational background, likes, and dislikes.

2. The speaking portion of this activity can be more formalized by having students practice their presentation with a peer until they no longer have to rely on their own written statements. The idea is not to get students to memorize the presentation, but rather to give them a chance to practice the language structures before they try to produce them on their own. Then, students can present their photos to a small group and independently produce the targeted language structures to tell about their families. If you feel this may be too challenging for your students, you might ask them to choose only two or three family members to talk about.

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms, trained teachers in TESL methods, and developed materials for English language programs in the United States and abroad.

Classroom Clues

First, unscramble these words to spell things you can see in the photo.

dustnets ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
11 21 9

richas ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
23 7

skeds ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
2 24 26

okclc ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
4 22

blockharad ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
13 19

Next, unscramble these words to spell verbs and verb phrases related to the scene in the photo.

alner ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
14 5

kinth ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
6 10

swaner ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
25 16

dear kobos ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
1 8 15

ryt royu steb ➠ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
12 17 3 20 18

Last, use the numbered letters from the words above to fill in the blanks and discover a message.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

Answers on page 42

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

CLASSROOM CLUES

Message: Education is the key to success.

ryt royu steb ⇐ try your best
dear kobos ⇐ read books
swaner ⇐ answer
kinth ⇐ think
alner ⇐ learn

blockharad ⇐ chalkboard
okclc ⇐ clock
skeds ⇐ desks
richas ⇐ chairs
dustnets ⇐ students