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## **Applied Theatre, Adolescent English Learners, and the Performance of Literacy**

Youth in middle and secondary grades, between childhood and the adult world, sometimes struggle with their identities as readers and learners. Too many describe themselves or are described by their teachers and parents as “reluctant, disengaged, and/or unmotivated” by classroom texts or by the rows of books in school libraries.

Even though blockbuster series have powered young adult fiction and cinematic markets over the last two decades (e.g., *Harry Potter* *The Hunger Games* *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*), “I don’t like to read” is nevertheless a common refrain in schools and in homes. The self-construction of adolescent youth, especially boys, as “bad” or “reluctant” readers is alarming at a number of levels—first, for those young people who have framed themselves in that way; and, second, for the societies they will enter and ultimately sustain. As such, creating a “culture of reading” across schooling contexts has been the subject of scholarship and international forums specifically dedicated to research and practice for literacy (Christenbury, Bomer, and Smagorinsky 2009; Power, Wilhelm, and Chandler 1997; Wilhelm 2008).

In terms of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), the communicative language teaching paradigms that have long dominated the field tend to downplay literacy as a focus in preference for conceptualizing language as distinct if overlapping skill sets of reading, writing, and listening. Whether a student did or did not like reading

has historically been of less concern to a field more focused on communicative language development. Yet, with more contemporary proponents of “literacy” arguing the multidimensional, multimodal, and existential ways of reading the “word/world” as an alternative (Freire 2000; Heath 1983; Paris 2011), the concept of literacy has slowly begun entering the professional lexicon of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) International Association and other leading English language teaching professional organizations; in addition, the “power of reading” is an emerging centerpiece of primary and secondary curricular paradigms (see Fay and Whaley 2004; Krashen 1993).

In this article, we argue that how adolescent language learners position themselves as readers does matter to teachers of EFL and that teachers do not have to accept a student’s declaration of “I don’t like to read” as a permanent reality. Schools, and English language classrooms in particular, can promote a culture of reading that forwards a communicative paradigm and at the same time embraces literacy as a “system for representing the world to ourselves—a psychological phenomenon; at the same time it is a system for representing the world to others—a social phenomenon” (Barton 1994, 33).

Specifically, we outline in practical ways the potential of applied theatre for stimulating purposeful, creative literacy engagement with adolescent learners in order to engage communication in multiple modalities and in interactive ways. We begin with a brief overview of applied theatre and contemporary theorizations of its relationship to literacy development. We continue with a description of four approaches for activating applied theatre for literacy development, using Shel Silverstein’s (1964) *The Giving Tree*

as an anchor example. We conclude with special attention to how applied theatre might be leveraged across grade levels in diverse classroom settings and adapted for varied genres and forms of text. Our intent is directed to practitioners with the message that bringing theatre into the language classroom can be more than a warm-up activity or an end-of-unit celebration for parents and siblings. Rather, applied theatre can engineer far deeper literacies that ultimately reposition reading as transacting with the wor(l)d.

### **Four moves for deepening literacy production**

While the strategies we describe can be used with any number of texts, as a common thread we use *The Giving Tree* to illustrate the theatrical “moves” we advocate. Just as other literacy strategies can be adapted to suit context and content, these applications of theatre can be used with a wide range of texts for a multitude of purposes, in series or in isolation. The short narrative of *The Giving Tree* tells of the relationship between a boy and a tree. Initially, the boy embraces the tree as a playmate—climbing under its wide branches. However, as he grows into a young man, he begins asking the tree for pieces of itself—its apples, branches, and finally its trunk—until the tree is nothing more than a stump for an old man to rest on. All the while, the Giving Tree is “happy” if the boy-man is happy—regardless of the sacrifices she makes to satiate his needs.

Traditionally, reading a story such as *The Giving Tree* would be broken down into a series of print-based pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities that might include vocabulary review or vocabulary building exercises as a way of activating readers’ language schema in advance of the text; formative comprehension checks

perhaps in the form of mapping out the narrative's beginning, middle, and end; and, finally, some sort of summative comprehension check—often in the form of short written answers on paper.

As we will illustrate, applied theatre reframes reading as a creative transaction with meaning. These strategies can take verbal and non-verbal forms. They can be used in isolation or in combination. As such, readers are not looking for a fixed meaning within a text that they individually demonstrate their understanding of through a series of correct answers. Instead, literacy through an applied theatre lens frames reading as a recursive, collaborative, and generative transaction with meaning.

Like applied math and applied linguistics, applied theatre is eminently practical—with a primary focus not on distanced theories but on the immediacy of performance. Applied theatre can and should happen outside of traditional theatre spaces—whether that space is a school classroom, a library, a women's clinic, an outdoor farmers' market, a street corner—or just about anywhere. Breaking from traditional conceptualizations and enactments of performance, applied theatre values the dynamic, creative processes of embodied literacy embedded in day-to-day human activity and relations, with a focus on the process of creating. Whether it ends in a performance or not, applied theatre is in and of itself a generative act.

Because applied theatre has roots in the realms of both theatre education and popular theatre, many point out that though the term “applied theatre” is contemporary, its origins are ancient (see Prendergast and Saxton 2009). Indeed, communities and individuals have for millennia leveraged public performance to explore, express, and give meaning to individual and community experiences. Whether we are referring to *Theatre*

*of the Oppressed* (Boal 1979), Brecht's Learning Plays of the 1920s and 30s (Hughes 2011), or the rituals of ancient Greece and Africa, theatre has included practitioners dedicated to participant-centered forms in a range of contexts, sometimes including classrooms.

Research supporting and describing the links between applied theatre and literacy learning rests on this history and relies heavily on a growing base of case studies and practitioner-driven inquiry that help those inside and outside the field imagine the nuances of the communication context fostered by the union of drama and literacy. Theatre strategies mediate a space for generative, social meaning-making and response to literature (Schneider, Crumpler, and Rodgers 2006), scaffolding talk (Dwyer 2004), driving collaborative inquiry and problem solving across subject areas (Bowell and Heap 2001; Swartz and Nyman 2010), and shaping and informing writing (Grainger 2004). This context, reliant on the chemistry between leader and participants in equal part, is particularly effective for inspiring literacy growth among groups traditionally labeled "reluctant" or typically underserved by their system of education, including English language learners (Kao and O'Neill 1998).

Adolescent students in particular welcome the interplay of immediacy and distance in theatre as a way to negotiate complex identities between real and imagined worlds (Gallagher 2007). As students embody the theatrical space, they come to own the communication and shared context it fosters as well. In some settings, the theatrical mode echoes and honors familiar local cultural forms (Kendrick et al. 2006), creating an opportunity for deepening relevance.

The four moves we describe (context building, narrative action, poetic action, reflective action) have much in common with the pre/while/after-reading sequence in that the moves are purposefully helping readers engage with the text at hand in scaffolded ways (see Figure 1, adapted from Neelands and Goode 2000).



**Figure 1. Four “moves” for engineering deep literacy**

There can be elements of story (beginning, middle, and end) inherent in an applied theatre approach to exploring a narrative, but when the approach is framed as a literacy process, the focus is on providing readers with multiple opportunities for meaning-making and symbolic representation of experience. In the sections that follow, we illustrate how the concept of applied theatre can become action. Blending ideas from the landmark drama/theatre compendium of strategies compiled by Neelands and Goode (2000) with contemporary arguments for textual enactments in middle grades and

secondary-level literacy instruction (Wilhelm 2004, 2008), and incorporating our own shared experiences as theatre/literacy educators, we outline the concepts of context building, narrative action, poetic action, and reflective action as possibilities for the EFL classroom. Our intent is to create a direction for teachers interested in exploring the potential of process-oriented enactment strategies in fostering spaces for deep literacy engagement for reluctant adolescent readers.

### **Context building: Co-creating wor(l)ds**

Applied theatre engages everyday people as “spect-actors,” where the line between actor and spectator/audience is purposely blurred. This approach fosters perspective taking that disrupts traditional power structures and interaction patterns such as teacher/student or performer/audience through embodied analytic communication (Boal 1979; Kao and O’Neill 1998). While some forms of applied theatre rely upon a degree of theatre expertise among facilitators or performers, the heart of applied theatre is of and for the common person. Applied theatre is home to trained artists and to regular folks with a continuum of approaches, contexts, and participants. Indeed, a tenet of applied theatre is its inclusion of and its connection to community, place, and participants. O’Neill (1995), a noted process drama scholar, points out that sometimes a strong theatrical sense helps applied theatre practitioners, and sometimes it is a hindrance. When the goal of the work is as much (or more) about inspiring, challenging, and framing the perspectives of participants as it is about performing art, seasoned theatre artists can struggle to let go of habits of traditional theatre performance that short-circuit responses to in-the-moment developments reliant on strong listening and observation.

This is welcome news for novices, such as EFL classroom teachers, applying theatre in their context. No experience is required to begin.

Traditional plays center on the sequential performance of a scripted work; applied theatre centers on collective meaning-making and may or may not culminate in a final, polished performance in the traditional sense. Rather, creative explorations frequently progress more episodically than chronologically, with a heavy emphasis on participants inhabiting (and being challenged within) a range of perspectives, instead of enlivening a single character. Thus, an individual or group might simultaneously be asked to take on the perspectives of multiple characters—or even peripheral imagined characters to the story. In the case of *The Giving Tree*, spect-actors might be asked to take on the role of the tree or the boy or the tree’s imagined best friend—a little squirrel—or the boy’s cousin.

### ***Sound-tracking texts***

In process-based theatre, context-building conventions prepare participants for interaction with a specific text or idea as well as uncover or construct background and backstory. Theatre practitioners recognize that readers bring to texts “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al. 1992) or “schema” for transacting in dynamic ways with language, culture, and literacy. Sound-tracking is one such strategy. A collaboratively created soundscape helps participants build the world of *The Giving Tree* aurally as a way to activate prior knowledge and imagination. Before sharing the book with students, the teacher has them brainstorm a list of words to describe a child-friendly forest where trees care for people and people care for trees. What are the sounds of this forest? What are the

primary sounds? The subtle sounds? Are there words? Are there voices? Have students suggest options and try them out, slowly building a one-minute soundscape using the class as the sound chorus, pausing for feedback and revision from the whole group, then circling back to incorporate ideas. We encourage teacher-facilitators to limit sound-making options to student voices and sound-making movements (e.g., whistling like a bird or gently tapping on a wooden desk in a way that might evoke rainfall) to foster innovation and focus problem solving.

### ***Freeze-framing the written word***

Having students use only their bodies and each other to create images in response to challenges creates opportunities for collaboration and communication physically, verbally, and non-verbally. To get at comprehension, we have leveraged something we like to think of as “freeze-frame reading”—an activity that blends kinesthetic and visual intelligences by challenging participants to use their own bodies to create a frozen image of a textual moment or key concept. The activity typically begins with a shared reading of a short text or passage (fiction or non-fiction), followed by an identification and discussion of a key moment in the narrative or an important concept. *The Giving Tree* provides readers with multiple opportunities for freeze-frames. Freeze-frames allow participants to identify and embody a specific narrative moment of the relationship between the boy and the tree or a complex concept such as “generosity.” Still images can also be used to help participants flesh out and share inferences about a setting, a relationship, a history, or a lifespan.

Students, in groups of three or more, might also create with their bodies a single frozen frame to illustrate a key contextual moment or concept. Allow groups time to brainstorm and rehearse. Share with the group at large. While each group is frozen, prompt the onlookers for analysis with questions like these:

- “What do you see?”
- “What relationships are here?”
- “If you had to give this image a title, what would it be?”
- “What might this person be thinking or saying?”

Stress to participants that the freeze-frame is frozen. Only the observers can talk. After each group’s “performance,” give the frozen group a brief opportunity to explain their intentions, qualifying that this is different from charades because there is no specific correct answer. In the prompt, students can be charged to create specific kinds of still images as it suits the larger drama, such as surveillance camera stills, photos from an album, or an advertisement.

### **Narrative action: Moving the story forward**

Narrative conventions help participants build the emerging drama’s plot. This is not the same as dramatizing an existing story; rather, it involves enacting some elements, but also extending and elaborating ideas only hinted at in the text, implied in the illustrations, or imagined by participants. Narrative strategies are recursive and fluid but always build meaning.

### ***Expert meetings about content and issues***

Endowing the participants with expertise (power, high status) and the leader with a problem requiring assistance (need, low status) turns the hierarchy of the classroom on its head and prompts participants to speak and think and share and listen (Heathcote and Bolton 1995). Let's say that the adolescents reading *The Giving Tree* are part of an imagined community conservation alliance—they are responsible for taking care of the trees but even more for protecting the environment for future generations. The teacher, in role as a new assistant to a local government official, initiates a conversation soliciting ideas, framing the children as experts—an arborist, a scientist, a farmer, a park ranger—and asking them to formulate their expert opinions about why trees are disappearing or abused and what possible actions should be taken.

Initiating an “expert meeting,” the teacher, out of role, explains that (1) there will be a meeting, and the students will be playing roles of people concerned with trees; (2) the teacher will take on a role, too; and (3) everyone must work together to improvise possibilities.

Some groups benefit from brainstorming a list of possible expert roles, but we caution against assigning everyone a role. Let them choose as the meeting evolves. Some will make strong character choices, others remain closer to themselves, and still others simply observe. All are valid ways to participate. The meeting itself need not be longer than a few minutes. Some teachers opt to wear a small costume piece to differentiate between themselves when they are in and out of role. It is helpful to think about the teacher as fostering possibilities rather than answering questions: opening up, not closing

down. The meeting can close with the promise of future contact. This is a beginning, not an end.

### ***Interview pairs about main and peripheral ideas***

After students form pairs, one student interviews the other. One person in the pair is from the committee or is a reporter, and the other a community member who knows something about the situation. To support those students tentative about language, decide on a few stock questions (“What is your name?”; “How or what do you know about [global warming]?”), and then generate a common list of possible interview subjects and share possible questions for specific interviewees.

For *The Giving Tree*, interview subjects might include the park ranger, an elderly woman who lives at the edge of the woods, a political activist, or a talking rock. The pair engages in a brief, scaffolded interview, perhaps two minutes long, in which one partner questions and the other answers to build background information. All pairs are interviewing in parallel. There is no audience. After the interviews, the interviewer reports his or her most interesting finding to the class. An emerging student might simply read aloud a written response to the interview questions that his or her classmate has recorded on paper. An advanced student may speak as if reporting on the television news.

### ***Hotseating characters and readers***

*Hotseating* is essentially a group interview (interrogation) of one person. Hotseating and interview pairs are the same at their heart, with different stakes. The public nature of being interrogated on the hotseat by a crowd differs qualitatively from

chatting one-on-one with a reporter in a quick interview. The context can be framed as a hearing or a media interview. If *The Giving Tree* drama work continually points to a person who has a significant hand in or a significant insight into the deforestation issue, he or she might be a worthwhile hotseat candidate: perhaps the boy or perhaps the Giving Tree will be recommended. Challenging the group to hotseat a role not fleshed out in the text creates a degree of creative freedom and challenge. Generating strong hotseat questions both as a group and individually prior to assigning the hotseated role improves the quality of questions and prepares those to be interrogated.

### ***He said/She said***

One example of a scaffolded hotseat is something we call “He said/She said.” This narrative strategy asks participants to assume the role of a character in a text—or an implied character—and to explain his or her point of view and subsequent rationale for his or her actions. With *The Giving Tree*, participants might, for example, assume the role of the tree or the boy—or an imagined character, such as the boy’s grandparents or a squirrel—and be called before what might be termed the “Forest Council.”

Again, students form small groups, this time prepping a participant to play a role with talking points for a brief “opening statement” explaining the rationale for or—depending on the role—their perception of a character’s actions. For example, the boy’s opening statement might narrate a childhood tragedy that left him completely dependent on the tree. The tree’s opening statement might describe her ideas about generosity and how it was that she came to feel so responsible for the boy’s happiness. A peripheral

character such as a squirrel might describe his or her feelings about seeing the tree destroy herself.

After the series of opening statements that might include a “counter narrative” of the boy-man justifying his actions or grounding his dependency on an imagined background story—for example, he was orphaned as an infant and his father and mother had entrusted his well-being to the tree—the characters engage in a question/response session (hotseat) with the class. You can opt to use the introductions to segue into hotseating for each role, or you can have the group vote on which two perspectives they want hotseated, based on the introductions.

### **Poetic action: Representing and symbolizing structures and concepts**

Many theatre-based explorations with young people include narrative-action and context-building elements, stopping short of the deeper elements fostered by poetic action and reflective action. Poetic strategies challenge participants to work on the symbolic and abstract levels with “highly selective use of language and gesture” (Neelands and Goode 2000, 6). While language and gesture contract to become focused and spare, the context in terms of time and space frequently expands to foster broader, deeper inquiries and insights and complex perspectives. In other words, as readers engage in a text, representing and symbolizing push student spect-actors to ask themselves what the text means for their lives—its potential implications and applications for who they are and who they are becoming. Thus, “poetic moves” encourage readers to think about decoding text as a creative act—not merely figuring out what the text means at the word, sentence, or discourse level, but what it could also mean symbolically for their specific contexts.

### ***Forum theatre: Public re-vision***

Forum theatre, a convention originating from Boal (1979), functions just as it sounds. A small group of spect-actors depicts a carefully selected challenging scene or situation while the remaining spect-actors look on. However, the wall between actors and observers is permeable, and actor or observer can stop the action at any point to share any insight, ask a question, or even replace an actor with an observer. The scene is replayed, interrupted, problematized, and analyzed several times with the goal of possibility and exploration as an aim, not just performing a “good scene.”

To begin, choose two actors to be the boy and the Giving Tree in their old age. Have them play out the story as written. Discuss with the entire group how some readers consider that this is a story about sharing; other readers see it as about selfishness. Explain that the actors are going to replay the story and, at any point, you or they can call “freeze” to stop the action. Challenge the audience to find stopping places where a different course of action could be taken if different choices were made or different circumstances were in place. Perhaps share a limited example to demonstrate the logistics, but be careful not to simply replay a different story with a plot dictated by the leader. Be ready with questions like, “What other options does the tree have here?”; “What about the boy?”; “Would intervention by another character change the story?”; and “What other events could occur and impact the story?” The discussion among the forum at these stopping places is even more important than the acting out of the story. Remember, a member of the forum can share an idea for the current actors to enact, or a member of the forum can replace an actor, bringing a new dimension and voice to the

evolving scene. Finally, reflect individually and collectively on these new choices and endings and their messages. This reflection might be done in the form of a sharing circle—with participants simply voicing their ideas—or on paper in small groups with a representative sharing the group’s combined short reflection.

***Flashback/Flashforward: Narrative points of view***

Purposely playing with time helps break students out of the narrative mindset. Asking them to construct scenes, stories, or still images across a broad spectrum of time does include a narrative element, but it also challenges participants to boil down and focus their art. Taking away the verbal element can heighten the art as well as scaffold communication across language borders.

For *The Giving Tree*, a poetic exercise might take the form of having the adolescents imagine it is now 50 years after the tree’s death. They have been commissioned to create a wordless, musical video tribute to honor the history of the forest where the Giving Tree lived. Select a piece of music that is one minute long and have the adolescents form groups of three to five and choreograph a wordless scene from the history of the forest to perform for the entire class and then craft into a whole. Or, if the group wants to enter physically first, the teacher might ask the class to make a forest using their bodies—and then to embody that same forest in some sort of danger of extinction or destruction.

**Reflective action: Looking forward, backward, and inward with texts**

Reflective conventions stop the action and ask participants to “stand aside . . . and take stock of meanings or issues that are emerging” (Neelands and Goode 2000, 75).

Participants are prompted to reflect, look back, or take a stand. Traditionally, having participants reflect on their learning happens as a means of closure in a well-planned lesson. We argue that theatre-centered strategies for bringing individual and group closure add layers of reflection to discussion and naturally meld disparate perspectives into a multi-voiced unit or experience. Moreover, the reflective strategies we describe in this last move make individuals' learning public and provide the teacher-facilitator with valuable summative feedback about what an adolescent or a group took away from embodying a text.

### ***Tapping into readers' reactions***

Have students take a place in the room to collect their thoughts. Explain that the leader will circulate and tap each person on the shoulder. When tapped, each participant will speak a word, phrase, or sentence that describes a vivid insight, feeling, or observation they had about *The Giving Tree* during the various performance “processes.” That might sound something like “Greed”; “Generosity can be destructive”; or “I’ll think before I ask for something—what my asking or taking might do to the other person.” For large classes with a range of language abilities, a variation on “tapping in” might include having clusters of students first form groups to discuss and record their reflections on paper. The clusters might then collectively embody some aspect of the mythical forest they depicted in the earlier learning segments with the teacher-facilitator tapping in not on individuals but on groups—with one or two group representatives articulating some of the reflections that members of the cluster voiced in the group reflection session.

### ***Spaces between characters' motivations and rationales***

After a session where the relationship between the boy and the Giving Tree is prominent, have two volunteers stand before the group, one representing the boy, the other representing the tree. Ask another volunteer to place the two in relationship to each other, with the distance between the two telling us something important about their relationship. Ask the volunteer who just placed the boy and the tree to explain or interpret the physical space between the two characters. This might sound something like, “The space between the boy and the tree is about how the boy only thinks about himself and never the tree. The tree wants them to be closer—but the boy is always leaving. That’s why the boy is far away from the tree.” Let the group comment and question. Repeat with others placing and explaining.

### ***Corridors of readers' responses***

Have the students imagine they are the collective conscience (or the thoughts) of the future generation of the Giving Tree’s forest. Explain to students that they will create a “human conscience hallway” with students facing each other about a meter apart in parallel rows. Each thinks of one piece of advice, one nagging question, or one cautionary phrase he or she wants the future generation to have in mind. Have a student walk through the human conscience hallway slowly as each student repeatedly says his or her chosen phrase. If time permits, have each participant take a turn walking through the conscience hallway.

## **Branching beyond *The Giving Tree***

We used *The Giving Tree* as an anchor text to help practitioners imagine specific strategies in action with a familiar text. The danger of aligning these strategies with a specific text, of course, is that readers start to see the strategies tied only to one story. It is important to remember that these strategies can be adapted to a wide range of texts. Traditional folklore, written or oral, pairs well with applied theatre strategies. In many ways, *The Giving Tree* echoes a folkloric style with its simple plot, elements of repetition, two-dimensional characters, and clear intended moral. The features entice participants to fill in, flesh out, and question the simple text. The story becomes the springboard for complexity through theatre. Adolescents find comfort in the familiar tales of childhood and freedom in twisting them into a new direction. Through soundscape, the context of a forest or a jungle or a kingdom or a market square can be enlivened in any classroom. Similarly, hotseating a character who has made errors, committed crimes, or acted selfishly positions spect-actors to flesh out two-dimensional characters with nuanced, justified motivations; the same is true of forum theatre. Further, finding traditional stories that are part of a community's culture creates opportunities to purposefully connect with local lore and resources. If there is no written text of the story available, then collecting, listening to, retelling, illustrating, and sharing local stories adds another culturally relevant layer to your literacy environment. Just be mindful to choose stories without strong religious or spiritual parameters to “play” with—there are always many.

The anchor text you work from could be any genre, from fiction to non-fiction to poetry—even an illustration or photograph. You can use all or a portion of the text. You

can use theatre strategies before, during, or after the full reading or examination of the text. However, some texts lend themselves more to the generative nature of applied theatre than others. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you filter texts for applied theatre possibilities:

- What are some multiple perspectives (written or implied) this text affords?
- What are the relationships and tensions that invite unpacking or extending?
- Are there “unseen scenes” or peripheral incidents worthy of exploration?
- Whose are the marginal voices that could be heard through dramatic activity?
- What are the hard-to-answer ethical questions this text evokes?
- What are the assumptions and easy answers that theatre could productively muddy?

The important step is to begin with a text that captures your interest and take a few small risks, then reflect and refine for the next episode. You will have many ideas, but the student work will suggest ideas and directions you had not imagined. Allow yourself time between installments to take in student ideas, mull them over, and build on them. As you grow in comfort applying theatre, you will be more able to do this on your feet. Your students’ positive response and their newfound voices brought forth in these authentically situated contexts will inspire your planning as well.

### **Conclusion: Performing literacy in classroom contexts**

In making reading about more than decoding words on a page, EFL teachers and teachers of drama and theatre find common ground to push back against students framing themselves as reluctant or bad readers. Using applied theatre strategies helps teachers

across disciplines stretch the multimodal and cultural borders of literacy to embrace multiple pathways to and through meaning-making that include traditional reading, writing, and listening facets within a broadened view of classroom communication covering an embodied semiotic system.

In other words, applied theatre creates opportunities for expressive and receptive communication in audio, gestural, spatial, linguistic, and visual modes working together in a complementary way (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). This effort makes space for diverse students to find entry points into the material. It also values adolescents in the co-construction process. Remember that teachers can start small, using a single strategy, or opt to string several strategies together in a single session or across a unit of instruction. Though the goal of this work is not performance, many teachers find that the material and excitement generated by students in a literacy-*cum*-applied theatre setting can be shaped into a sharing/performance event celebrating literacy and the meaning-making transaction that reading can be.

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### **BIODATA:**

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# Engaging Students as Tutors, Trainers, and Leaders

One of the greatest joys for teachers is to be able to inspire a love of teaching in their own students. Having students tutor other students is one way to accomplish this. A well-planned and carefully organized tutoring program can lead to remarkable gains for tutors, tutees, and teachers.

While starting a tutoring program may seem like a daunting and time-consuming task, it does not have to be. The best way to approach the creation and development of a tutoring service is with a list of clear objectives. In this article, I describe the process I used to create a tutoring program with my English as a foreign language university students. I identify questions that need to be addressed at each step of the program development process, then explain how my student tutors and I answered these questions.

The answers that shaped the final program were specific to our situation and location; however, if I had been in another location with different students and resources, the same questions would have led to different answers—and a different program. But it would have been a program tailor-made to fit the needs of the student tutors and the tutees. Thus, the only “right” answers to these questions are the ones that are “right” for each teacher’s time, place, and students.

## WHAT IS TUTORING?

It is perhaps best to begin by looking at an explanation of what tutoring is and what benefits it provides to both the tutors and their tutees. Peer tutoring, also known as

peer-assisted learning, is defined as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping and Ehly 1998, 1). It can incorporate everything from teaching, mentoring, and counseling to behavior modeling. Much of the research on peer tutoring is overwhelmingly positive (National Tutoring Association 2002). Peer tutoring has been studied in multiple settings and with many types, ages, and levels of learners, including (but not limited to) children, teenagers, second-language learners, and autistic learners. It has been studied with a variety of subjects, from biology and mathematics to physical education.

The positive benefits are numerous and significant. Topping and Ehly (1998) note that “tutors can learn to be nurturing toward their tutees, and in so doing, develop a sense of pride and responsibility” (4) and that improved motivation and attitude can lead to “greater commitment, improved self-esteem, self-confidence, and greater empathy with others” (13–14).

But tutoring leads to gains in more than self-esteem and empathy, important as these are. Research indicates that students who tutor others also make significant academic gains

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## Tutors can be almost any age, from primary school up, and they can come from a variety of disciplines.

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(National Tutoring Association 2002; Topping and Ehly 1998; Galbraith and Winterbottom 2011; Fantuzzo et al. 1989; National Education Association 2014).

In their study of peer tutoring, Galbraith and Winterbottom (2011) report that “tutors’ perceptions of their role motivated them to learn the material, and their learning was supported by discussion and explanation, revisiting fundamentals, making links between conceptual areas, testing and clarifying their understanding, and reorganizing and building ideas, rehearsing them, and working through them repeatedly, to secure their understanding” and that “mental rehearsal of peer-tutoring episodes helped them appreciate weaknesses in their own subject knowledge” (321).

It is important to be aware that, while this article focuses on a program that was created to provide teaching experience to pre-service English teachers, *anyone* can tutor—and *anyone* can be tutored. Tutors can be almost any age, from primary school up, and they can come from a variety of disciplines. Ten-year-olds can tutor six-year-olds. Biology students can tutor others in biology. Accountants can tutor in business. The benefits to tutors and tutees are similar regardless of the field in which they are working.

### HOW TO DEVELOP A TUTORING PROGRAM

The following seven steps serve as a guide to plan, develop, and initiate a successful tutoring program.

#### **Step 1: Determine the needs of both the tutees and tutors and design a program that meets them**

My first questions were about the tutees, the people my students would tutor. I needed to determine the following:

- Who (and how old) will the tutees be?

- Do they need homework help, conversation practice, assistance in writing, or listening practice?

At this stage in the process, it is essential to be aware of local beliefs about education. For example, although peer-tutoring programs are common in the United States, in the culture where I was teaching, university students are reluctant to accept instruction from their peers. Thus, it was best for my students to work with younger, school-aged children who were learning English, and the program became a cross-age tutoring program focused on having tutors use communicative language teaching methodology to provide homework assistance.

Secondly, I had to think about who the tutors would be and what their own needs and goals were. I had to consider:

- What experience do the tutors need?
- Do they need opportunities to work with children, teenagers, adults—or learners of all ages?
- Do they need opportunities to lead classes or groups, or can they focus on one-on-one tutoring?

In my students’ cross-age tutoring program, they would be teaching children with a rather basic level of English. Would this be enough to push their own development of English? Kunsch, Jitendra, and Sood (2007) note that cross-age tutoring, where students have different levels of expertise, is a successful approach. In addition, research on cross-age tutoring indicates that tutors working with younger learners experience gains similar to those of peer tutors in the areas of empathy, confidence, and self-esteem (Yogev and Ronen 1982; Hill and Grieve 2011). Tutors still need to understand English well enough to

explain it clearly to younger learners, even if they are using the students' first language. In fact, clarity of explanation would be vital, as children have fewer metacognitive or coping strategies to resort to if they do not understand something.

My next question was, "Who should tutor?" I did not want to make being a tutor mandatory for all my students. I also wanted the service to be free for the children, meaning that the tutoring would not generate any income and that I would not pay my tutors for their work.

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## Tutors do not need to be experts in what they are tutoring; they can be in the process of learning the material.

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I also asked myself what criteria I should set for selecting my tutors. Should I allow only my students with the highest levels of English to tutor? What role should a student's responsibility, motivation, and initiative play in my decision regarding who should tutor? In the end, I opened the program to all my students and presented it as a unique volunteer opportunity that would look impressive on a curriculum vitae (CV). I also talked to students about the benefits of tutoring—how it would not only give them teaching practice, but also help them improve their English.

It is important to remember that tutors do not need to be experts in what they are tutoring; they can be in the process of learning the material. After my tutors had been tutoring for several months, I asked them what qualities a tutor should have. They responded that tutors should be interested in helping people, open to learning about their tutees and trying different techniques and ways to connect with them, and able to explain difficult concepts in simple, easy-to-understand language. Even the tutors themselves recognized that it is not necessary for an effective tutor to have advanced English proficiency.

### Step 2: Consider what resources are available

Try to answer the "who," "what," "where," and "when" questions about available resources to identify what you have and do not have. Some things to consider include:

- Who is available to observe and assist the tutors and provide feedback?
- What books and materials are available for the tutors to use?
- What other resources (e.g., computers, whiteboards, markers, desks, classrooms, Internet access) are available?
- Where can the tutoring sessions be held?
- When is the best time to hold the tutoring service?

For a new program, the ideal situation is one where the program can build on the popularity of a similar service. In our case, the local American Center was already offering English conversation classes to school-age children on Saturday afternoons, so it made perfect sense to arrange our tutoring service to coincide with their classes so that children could come early, receive homework help, and then stay for their conversation class. The American Center staff found a room to use for the tutoring and also made announcements to the children in their conversation classes.

Of course, not all teachers are as lucky as I happened to be—but, as my tutors became fond of telling people, all you really need for a successful tutoring session are a tutee, a pencil, and some paper. Tutoring can happen in any space and at any time. The most important aspect is the interaction between tutor and tutee, and that can happen anywhere.

One extremely important resource is other teachers who might be interested in helping develop and run a tutoring program and providing support to tutors. In fact, a group of teachers can divide the various tasks

of recruiting tutors, training tutors, and advertising the program. But even if there are no other teachers who are available to help set up and run a program, as the tutors become more experienced, they will be able to take on more and more responsibilities. In fact, this model worked well for us because it helped the tutors become self-sufficient and built their confidence and self-esteem.

Also, as the tutors became more experienced, they were able to develop their own materials. After a few months, there was a cabinet full of teaching aids that the tutors had collected or created on their own initiative.

### **Step 3: Develop a training program that is tailored to the context**

Again, look at who the tutors are, who the tutees will be, and the type of tutoring program you are planning. Different situations will require different information in training sessions to reflect the needs of the tutors. Skills-focused tutoring (such as writing, speaking, reading, or listening tutoring) will require different training than tutoring focused on providing homework help. Training can include information on any of the following areas, among others:

- methods of language teaching
- classroom management and behavior management
- child psychology and development
- error correction
- learning preferences and communication styles

Although creating a training packet can be a time-consuming task, it needs to be done only once, and teachers developing a training packet can ask other teachers for their input and assistance. In developing a tutor-training program, teachers can mine numerous resources available on the Internet and in teaching methodology books as they search for training materials. The Internet

resources listed in the Appendix can help. Some of the resources listed (for example, the Anoka-Ramsey Community College Tutor Training link) are complete tutor-training modules including readings and assignments. Teachers who have limited time to create a tutor-training program from scratch can have their tutors complete the training modules from this site or others. Again, the approach depends on the needs of the teachers, tutors, and tutees, and on the resources available. Personal teaching experience can also be part of the training materials; in fact, it might be the most valuable of all resources. An experienced tutor can be treated as a resource and should be encouraged to share tips and techniques with new tutors.

The training packet that I created contained lessons on effective tutoring techniques, communication skills (including active listening), and ways to correct errors. Because finding time for training sessions was difficult, tutors were required to complete the training packets outside the training sessions by working with a partner. Each training session consisted of a review of the work the tutors had done, and the last ten minutes were used to set up the next tasks and answer questions about them. The system worked, especially when the tutors realized that if they did not complete the tasks, they would not be allowed to work as tutors.

The most important parts of any tutor-training program include practice tutoring, observations, and tutor self-reflection. Teachers should provide new tutors with the opportunity to practice tutoring, preferably with more-experienced tutors; teachers should also observe new tutors at least once and invite tutors to reflect on what went well (and what they could improve) in their tutoring sessions.

### **Step 4: Recruit and train tutors**

This step goes back to the question of who the tutors will be. It is not always necessary that tutors be pedagogy students; remember, they will be provided with the necessary training for successful tutoring. In terms of the hiring

process, questions to consider include the following:

- Should prospective tutors submit CVs and/or undergo interviews?
- What are the specific hiring criteria?
- What level of English do the tutors need to have?
- What other criteria will there be in terms of responsibility, maturity, and communication skills?

I wanted to make the tutoring service as professional as possible and to emphasize the importance of making a commitment. Thus, I required that students submit a CV if they were interested in being tutors. How to write a CV was something we had studied in class, and therefore asking potential tutors to submit CVs was a practical extension of that lesson. I also asked them to write a letter of motivation explaining why they wanted to be tutors. When selecting tutors, I focused on students' level of interest in tutoring, interpersonal skills, and awareness of what tutoring is and what would be expected of them. Of course, while I considered these qualities to be important for the program I was starting, each program will be different, and thus the criteria for tutors should be different. Ultimately, the criteria for tutors will depend on the program objectives. Motivation, however, is an important quality for program success and sustainability.

#### **Step 5: Advertise the tutoring program**

After the tutors have been recruited and trained, it is time to advertise the tutoring program. Work with the tutors to spread the word about the program. Tutors can develop flyers and promotional materials. They can also contact local schools and universities, local English teachers, and English teacher associations; post information about the tutoring service on Facebook and other forms of social media; and encourage people to tell their friends and relatives.

Again, here is where it is useful, when possible, to build connections with other services that are already well known. Initial advertising can be conducted through word of mouth, which was what we did. Once the tutors became experienced, they wanted to advertise the program to a wider audience, and they created a trilingual brochure that included a map showing our tutoring location. They distributed the brochure to parents, English teachers, and children.

Of course, in advertising a free tutoring service for children, there is a danger that demand will outstrip the number of available tutors. When we faced this problem, the tutors took a vote and decided to extend their hours. They also decided to recruit and train additional tutors.

#### **Step 6: Begin the sessions**

After recruiting and training, we were ready to start. At this stage, observation, supervision, and feedback are critical to building a strong program. This is worth emphasizing, even if only one teacher is available to provide support to student tutors.

For our first tutoring session, I had the tutors work in pairs, with one tutor doing the actual tutoring and the other observing the session. After the tutoring hour ended, I invited the tutors to share their experiences, observations, and comments and suggestions.

The next tutoring sessions went extremely well. As my tutors worked with the children, I walked around and observed, making notes so that I could offer praise and suggestions. After each tutoring hour, the tutors and I would meet and discuss the sessions as a group. After several sessions, I encouraged the tutors to write a list of rules that would help them deal with the situations that they had encountered. One rule that the tutors felt was important was that parents had to wait outside the tutoring room (otherwise, the parents had a tendency to try to control the tutoring session). Tutors also agreed upon a strict first-come, first-served rule.

## Step 7: Expand the program and build self-sustainability

One of the most exciting aspects of a tutoring program is that it provides tutors with opportunities to become leaders and coordinators. A tutoring program will be self-sustainable if tutors take on the responsibility of running and promoting the program, recruiting and hiring new tutors, training new tutors, and continuing to provide feedback to each other. Think about what “officers” are needed to run the tutoring program. Should there be an attendance coordinator? A recruiting and training coordinator? A general coordinator?

Sustainability and growth are important parts of any tutoring program and should be considered even while the program is first being developed. In our situation, I wanted to ensure that the tutors would have the skills and knowledge they would need in order to run the service without me. Also, the majority of my students had never been given any opportunities to lead. I saw in several of my tutors the potential to successfully take on greater responsibility for the program, so I divided the work I was doing for the tutoring service into separate leadership roles and wrote descriptions for each. I decided that the service would need the following: an attendance coordinator to track both tutor and schoolchild attendance; a secretary to take notes at meetings, send out email notifications, and keep track of our resources; a community liaison to promote the service, write grants, and build relationships with local teacher groups; and two hiring and training coordinators.

When the tutors returned from winter break, we held elections to select their new leaders. I immediately gave a stack of new CVs to the hiring coordinators, and we discussed criteria for hiring new tutors. The experienced tutors took charge of hiring, training, and mentoring. The tutors expressed doubts about their readiness to completely take over the service, but as it turned out, they were more than capable of doing so. Six months after I left (and a full year after the tutoring service had begun), the tutors had 70 tutor applications, from which they hired 17 new tutors. As Aydan, one of the leaders of the

program, wrote, “Among the new tutors we have diplomats, translators, students from international relations, and others. They have so much desire to work, to help. I hope that this desire will stay with them for a long time.”

## WHAT WE LEARNED

As a teacher, I learned that a tutoring program leads to previously undreamed-of opportunities for both teachers and tutors. For example, the tutors I worked with were invited to give a presentation at a conference of English teachers in a neighboring country. This conference was, for many of the tutors, the highlight of their tutoring experience. Several of them had never been out of their country before, and none had ever delivered a presentation outside their classes. And yet there they were, standing in front of more than 100 English teachers, talking about the work they had been doing as English tutors.

Although this exact opportunity might not be available to everyone, there will be others. One way to motivate tutors is to connect them to local English teachers’ associations. Perhaps tutors can volunteer at local conferences in exchange for the chance to attend the conferences for free. Tutors can organize classes, festivals, or field trips for their tutees—the possibilities are endless. The main thing is to search for and be open to new ideas and possibilities.

I recently asked my tutors what they had learned from their tutoring experience. While I had expected a positive response, I was taken aback by how much self-awareness and insight their responses showed. Without my having prompted them, several tutors mentioned the same benefits that the researchers cited above had found.

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**A tutoring program leads to previously undreamed-of opportunities for both teachers and tutors.**

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One tutor, Sakina, in responding to my question, said, “Actually tutoring service is not that common in our home country, but implementing this project is really very useful for both the tutors and the students.” Another tutor, Aygul, said, “Tutoring allows you the opportunity to develop intellectually, psychologically, and personally. Tutors mature and gain self-confidence as they work. [...] It reinforced my ability to communicate clearly, logically, and creatively.”

Of course, we all learned the importance of remaining flexible, particularly in the early stages of the project. Tutors who were involved from the beginning were able to observe how such a program was designed and developed. Another lesson was the importance of using experienced tutors as resources—not only for hiring and training, but also for the

daily operations of the tutoring program and even in the creation of tutoring materials.

For myself, I learned that motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, is (almost) as good as money—though the tutors certainly looked forward to the baked goods and treats I would bring each week. And while there was one tutor who decided to stop tutoring due to family reasons, the other tutors stayed with the program all year. I attribute this dedication to the fact that they were all highly motivated and found the tutoring experience rewarding and enjoyable.

To help with tutor retention rates, I learned that it was important to provide additional support for tutors with weak language skills. In receiving this support, tutors felt more qualified to teach and at the same time

#### HOW TO START A TUTORING PROGRAM: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why am I starting a tutoring program? What do I hope to achieve?
2. What is the focus of the program (conversation, writing, homework help, etc.)?
3. Who are the tutors? What are their needs? Strengths? Weaknesses?
4. Who are the tutees? What are the tutees' needs?
5. What resources and materials will the tutors have available to them (books, Internet, computers, paper, etc.)? How and where can the program raise funds (grants, fund-raising, donations, etc.)?
6. What is the hiring and selection process for the tutors?
7. Where and when will the tutoring be conducted?
8. Who will be supervising and providing feedback to the tutors once they begin tutoring?
9. What should the training program consist of, and how should it be organized? How should the tutors be assessed to determine if they are qualified to tutor?
10. How will the tutoring program be advertised?
11. How can the program be made self-sustainable? How can the program be expanded?

**Figure 1. A framework of questions to consider when starting a tutoring program**

appreciated the opportunity to improve their English. As a tutor named Narmin said, “Tutors and tutees get benefits from this program. We tutors improve ourselves a lot. Sometimes we meet some words which we have forgotten, then we ask one another or look through a book. In this way we learn, too.”

## FINAL THOUGHTS

It is my hope that in detailing the process that I went through, this article can serve as a guide to others who wish to create similar programs. Again, my goal is not that other teachers will create exact replicas of my program; rather, it is that others will use this article and the framework of questions to create their own individualized programs. The questions in Figure 1 can be used as a starting point for discussions with colleagues—and I highly recommend that English teachers work together to divide the work of starting a tutoring program. I have also included a list of online resources in the Appendix that can be consulted in order to create a personalized training manual for tutors in either a peer-tutoring or cross-age tutoring program.

Creating a tutoring program was hard work, and there were many challenges along the way, but the result was more than worth the amount of work that went into the program. The tutors have developed not only a love of teaching but also a greater sense of self-worth. They have come to see themselves as coordinators and leaders. The children who come for help look up to the tutors and often greet them with hugs and big smiles. The tutors take their responsibilities to these children very seriously. They have developed their own techniques for facing challenging situations, some of which reveal amazing insight into teaching and learning. The tutors feel comfortable experimenting with techniques, and they often make their children stand and move, or use colored markers, or sing songs, or watch and respond to short videos.

That the tutors embrace communicative and interactive teaching methodology is especially

impressive—and critical—in a society where rote memorization and teacher-centered classrooms are still the norm. Perhaps it is because they are still students themselves that they are able to connect so closely with the children they work with, but whatever the reason, these amazing young tutors all have bright futures as English teachers and as leaders.

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# APPENDIX

## Online Resources for Creating a Training Packet for Tutors

### *Peer Tutoring ... a proactive intervention for the classroom*

[www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschoolbehavior/peertutor.pdf](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschoolbehavior/peertutor.pdf)

This is a brief, easy-to-read document that answers questions about how to begin and maintain a tutoring program. Although it is geared toward working with students with learning disabilities, the information applies to all types of tutoring.

### **Wellesley University Tutor Training Manual**

[www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/assets/departments/pltc/files/tutors/PLTC%20](http://www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/assets/departments/pltc/files/tutors/PLTC%20Tutor%20Training%20Manual%2010-11.pdf)

[Tutor%20Training%20Manual%2010-11.pdf](http://www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/assets/departments/pltc/files/tutors/PLTC%20Tutor%20Training%20Manual%2010-11.pdf)

This manual documents the types of logistics and content necessary to run a tutoring program (although it perhaps contains more than what an English tutoring program would need).

Beginning on page 19, it discusses ways to make tutoring sessions successful, and beginning on page 55, it presents time-management skills.

### **Tamanawis Peer Tutor Training Manual**

[tamanawistutors.wordpress.com/documents/peer-tutor-training-manual](http://tamanawistutors.wordpress.com/documents/peer-tutor-training-manual)

This is a slightly shorter manual that contains information on effective tutoring sessions, learning styles, and good listening strategies, among other things. Again, not all the information will be relevant to an English tutoring program, but the manual itself can serve as a model.

### **Anoka-Ramsey Community College Tutor Training**

[anokaramsey.mnscu.edu/tutor\\_training](http://anokaramsey.mnscu.edu/tutor_training)

This site contains ten interactive tutor-training modules, including “Introduction to Tutoring,” “Five Steps to Being Effective,” “Techniques That Work,” “Listening Skills,” and “Learning Styles.” Depending on the English level of the tutors, they could be directed to this site for specific self-study modules.

### **AmeriCorps’s Students Teaching Students: A Handbook for Cross-age Tutoring**

<http://sbceo.org/~sbcsli/aHerczog.pdf>

This is a handbook for setting up a cross-age tutoring program. It is not intended to be given to tutors; rather, the information should be adapted for training tutors. It is particularly useful for younger tutors.

# On How Thinking Shapes Speaking: Techniques to Enhance Students' Oral Discourse

**T**he institution where we work in Buenos Aires—*Asociación Ex Alumnos del Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas “Juan Ramón Fernández”* (AEXALEVI)—is devoted to the teaching of foreign languages, particularly English, and it administers examinations all over Argentina. One central problem we have identified in our work in the AEXALEVI Teachers' Centre is the compartmentalization of instruction and assessment.

For five years we held virtual and face-to-face forums with instructors from Buenos Aires and other districts, and most of these teachers reported that they generally teach the content of the syllabus as one thing, and they deal with exam training as a separate component in the course design, developed close to examination time and not before. However, when the teacher indulges in teaching to the test, the student does not have the chance to develop skills over time. For example, we have observed students who can rattle off the summary of a story, overtly learned by heart, without ever being able to answer a simple question from the examiner or interact with a peer in a communicative task. Were the students trained to recite the story? Surely they were. Were the students given opportunities to develop oral skills throughout the course so that they would be able to engage in realistic talk? We do not think so. Here lies the danger of treating course and exam, and by the same token, teaching/learning and evaluation, as two separate components rather than as an integrated whole.

At the Teachers' Centre, we felt we needed to take a step forward to design ways to introduce changes in skill development to help students both improve their speaking ability and perform better on tests. The experience we are going to describe was born out of a concern to accomplish these goals. This article describes several techniques that allow students to structure their oral discourse in meaningful ways, which we hope will be useful for other teachers in similar contexts.

## STRATEGIES TO STRUCTURE ORAL DISCOURSE

When we teach our students how to write a composition in a foreign language, we teach them how to structure their writing. To this end, we provide pictures, guiding questions, key words, sentence starters, and model paragraphs to help them feel at ease with the difficult task ahead. However, when it comes to dealing with speaking in a foreign language—in this case, English—we may not be totally aware that oral discourse requires

structuring as well. The more our students speak English in class, the more chances they have to improve their performance in English, and as a result, they are expected to perform better in oral exams. However, all learners are different, and some may need more than just opportunities for speaking in English. In our experience, some students benefit from learning strategies on how to structure oral discourse. We have observed that certain techniques help these students to gain confidence and get started in oral performance, basically because the techniques, as we will show, prevent the students from purposeless wandering when they have to give certain answers in oral interaction.

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## The more our students speak English in class, the more chances they have to improve their performance in English.

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Brown (2001) highlights the importance of developing strategic competence, one of the components of the communicative competence model supporting successful oral communication (Canale and Swain 1980; Bachman 1990). Our efforts in the classroom are based on helping students think and act strategically—skills that will surely make them become more efficient communicators in English.

### THINKING AND ROUTINES

A large amount of research has been done in the area of learning strategies and their training; this research shows that strategy training must be explicit and contextualized in situations in which the students can appreciate the value of the strategy and that development of strategies occurs over time as they are modeled, applied, and evaluated by teachers and students (Hsiao and Oxford 2002; Cohen 2000; O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990; Wenden 1991).

As teachers, we had always provided our students with *language banks* (e.g., vocabulary

relevant for the task, linkers, suitable openings and endings, useful expressions), which we worked on systematically throughout the course. However, this time we were seeking something different, something that could help students structure their oral discourse. It was then that we did research into how thinking shapes speaking by analyzing and applying the work of Ritchhart (2002) on thinking routines.

All teachers are familiar with routines, those actions that we do in class with the purpose of organizing classroom life: hands up before a speaking turn is assigned, an agenda written on the board at the beginning of each class, silent reading time on Friday afternoons. Ritchhart says that “classroom routines tend to be explicit and goal-driven in nature” and that “their adoption usually represents a deliberate choice on the part of the teacher” (2002, 86). Yet not all classroom routines are alike. Some routines help to organize students’ behavior, whereas others help to support thinking. Ritchhart calls the latter “thinking routines” and defines them as those routines that “direct and guide mental action” (2002, 89). Of the many routines that we may have in the classroom, thinking routines explicitly support mental processing by fostering it. An example is starting a fresh unit with a brainstorming task in which prior knowledge is recorded in a web. Brainstorming and webbing are thinking routines in that they “facilitate students’ making connections, generating new ideas and possibilities, and activating prior knowledge” (Ritchhart 2002, 90).

Thinking routines have certain features such as the fact that “they consist of few steps, are easy to teach and learn, are easily supported, and get used repeatedly” (Ritchhart 2002, 90). They can be singled out easily because they are named in a certain way—for example, “brainstorming, webbing, pro and con lists, Know–Want to know–Learned (KWL)” (Ritchhart 2002, 90). Apart from fostering thinking, these routines serve major purposes. Thus, a list of pros and cons may turn out to be a good way of choosing between options before we make a decision, and a KWL chart

may help us record what we know about a topic, what we wish to learn about it, and finally, after the topic has been explored, what we have learned in relation to it. According to Ritchhart, “thinking routines are more instrumental than are other routines” (2002, 90). Of the examples that he provides, we selected two to begin our work, and then we developed three of our own.

## AN EXAMINATION OF TWO TECHNIQUES

In the descriptions below we have labeled the selected routines as techniques, relying on Brown’s (2001) principles for speaking activities. Brown suggests using “techniques that cover the spectrum of learner needs from language-based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning and fluency” (2001, 275). We consider that the techniques in this article fall somewhere along this continuum in that they provide support for students to engage in various classroom tasks. In addition, Brown offers useful designations that techniques must be “intrinsically motivating” and that teachers should help students “to see how the activity will benefit them” (2001, 275).

### **Technique 1: Say what. Say why. Say other things to try**

The first technique was *Say what. Say why. Say other things to try*, which was suggested to Ritchhart (2002) by a colleague. It sounds straightforward and catchy, with a rhythm that Ritchhart highlights as essential for students to remember. We decided that this technique could help our students frame their answers to personal questions, a common real-life situation. In many exam situations students are generally required to answer questions of this sort as well.

We filmed three adult students whose skills were at the Common European Framework level A2 for spoken interaction (Council of Europe 2001). We told them to imagine that they were getting ready for a job interview. All of them produced disorganized replies and made plenty of errors. It was as if the students were randomly trying to sort information

in order to give an answer. For example, to the question “What do you do on weekends?” one student answered, “I usually went to my house, to clean my house, I usually go with my dog to the park and sometimes I go by bicycle and then I like to learn to read another things not in relation to my profession.” We did not make any corrections; we just allowed each student to speak freely, each of them in his or her assigned turn. Our next step was to ask these students how they felt about their answers. They agreed that they were not happy with their performance and felt they did not have the words to answer the question. We suspected that one problem might have been that they did not know how to organize their answers, so we went ahead with the technique.

We explained to them that we were going to teach them a trick to help them answer the question. As we went along, we jotted down the steps of the technique on the board: For the question “What do you do on weekends?” first say what you do—for example, “I go jogging” or “I read a lot.” (We elicited from the students the actions they did.) Next say why you do that—for example, “I go jogging because I love exercise” or “I read a lot because I have a lot of books and little time on weekdays.” (We elicited answers from them, encouraging them to link this new idea with their previous answers, thus producing a short stretch of speech.) Finally, add more information: Say other things to try. For example, “I go jogging because I love exercise. I always go alone because my friends don’t like to exercise much.” Or, “I read a lot because I have a lot of books and little time on weekdays. Right now I am about to finish a novel. It’s very exciting.” (Here again, we elicited possible answers from the students as we helped them produce a longer piece of discourse.)

The students found the technique enjoyable, noting that it was a rhyme and easy to recall. We passed on to the second part of the procedure, which was filming the students as they answered the same question with the aid of the technique. During the task, they looked

at the steps of the technique on the board. Following is the production of the student whose first answer we transcribed above, as she applied the technique:

*Say what:* “I always go to the park with my dog.”

*Say why:* “Because my dog loves running.”

*Say other things to try:* “And we stay there at six p.m.”

Despite some grammatical inaccuracy, the student significantly improved the organization of her answer. We observed the same improvement in the discourse of the other two students in the rehearsal situation. It is worth mentioning that we were just experimenting with the technique, and yet it rendered benefits.

We were curious, of course, to see how the technique would work when we introduced it to a larger group of students as part of a communicative task. After a whole-class talk on stress and modern life, we asked the students to work in pairs and ask each other about their activities and habits in order to find out how stressful their lives were in comparison with their partner’s. After the student pairs reported to the whole class, we said that we were going to ask them a question to check the findings, as people may have different perceptions of what it means to lead a stressful life. We asked some students randomly, “How much free time do you have?” As we expected, some answers were a bit disorganized.

We announced that we were going to show them how to organize their ideas to optimize their answers. We explained the technique and then asked students to do the task again. Afterwards, we asked the students to say what they thought of the technique, and they agreed that it had been useful. We produced a poster with the steps to display on the classroom board as reference. We pointed out that in future lessons we were going to apply the technique to any personal question that was asked in class. Two examples of subsequent questions and answers follow:

1. *Question:* “How often do you go to the cinema?”

*Say what:* “I go to the cinema once a month.”

*Say why:* “Because the ticket is quite expensive for me.”

*Say other things to try:* “I really love science fiction films.”

2. *Question:* “What did you do last weekend?”

*Say what:* “I went to my grandmother’s house.”

*Say why:* “Because I missed her.”

*Say other things to try:* “We played cards and we had fun.”

We suggested that the students could document the steps of the technique in their cell phones or tablets in case they wished to refer to them outside the classroom.

### **Technique 2: Claim, support, question**

The second technique was *Claim, Support, Question (CSQ)* (Ritchhart 2002, 91), which means that the students first have to say something or make a point, then provide evidence or a reason for the point, and finally pass the speaking turn to their partners by asking a question. At work, people engage in meetings and videoconferences where they interact and exchange opinions as they keep the conversation going towards a goal. In everyday life, we interact with others to choose a present for a friend, to decide what to do on the weekend, or to plan where to go on an upcoming holiday. We thought that this technique would work for discussion tasks in which students have to interact with each other to make a decision or solve a problem.

We repeated the procedure described for Technique 1 above by filming the students doing a discussion task both before and after providing them with the technique. The task consisted

of viewing several birthday gift options and deciding which one to buy for a friend. Here is an extract of what a student pair said:

### **Student A**

*Claim:* “It’s Ale’s birthday this week. We could buy a present for him. He likes reading books.”

*Support:* “Yesterday I saw a best seller.”

*Question:* “What about buying it for him?”

### **Student B**

*Claim:* “I don’t know. Best sellers are expensive.”

*Support:* “Perhaps a CD will be cheaper.”

*Question:* “What do you think?”

The interaction went on like this until the students reached a decision. We found that the technique helped the students understand that for interactive communication, they need to pass the turn to their interlocutor. Discussion tasks are not monologues by one student who monopolizes the conversation and leaves little time for the other person to talk, nor are they tasks to be completed by each student individually with no interaction.

When we introduced the technique to a group of students in the classroom, we first modeled the interaction with the aid of a ball. As we carried out the task, we used the ball to signal each step: Claim (bounce), Support (bounce), Question (throw the ball to your partner). Movement associated with talking probably helps to fix the technique in memory besides adding more fun to the task. After modeling and with the technique written on the board, we gave student pairs a small ball and began the discussion task. We noticed that some students did not bounce their balls, nor did they throw them to their partners. We decided not to interrupt the task at that point, but when it was the time for the report, we asked the students why they thought we had given

each pair a ball. Some students agreed that the ball had helped them remember the steps, and others admitted having forgotten to use the ball at all. We challenged them with further discussion tasks, and this time they all paid attention to the bouncing and throwing. Using a task sheet on which several pictures showed options for topics, student pairs chose to discuss how to spend a weekend away together (at the beach, in a skiing resort, at a camping site, and so on). They produced a dialogue similar to the following:

Student A: “In my opinion, we should go to the beach because we’ll have a lot of fun. What do you think?”

Student B: “I feel that going camping is the best choice because we’ll share many activities and long conversations. How do you feel about that?”

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## **We have always been concerned with how to help our students produce longer pieces of discourse.**

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The conversation continued until most of the topics were discussed and students came to a decision. Here again, the results were satisfactory in that the students were able to produce organized interaction.

### **THREE TECHNIQUES WE DEVELOPED**

In English as a foreign language learning contexts, because English is not spoken out in the community, students generally find it very difficult to sustain conversations. We have always been concerned with how to help our students produce longer pieces of discourse and had grown enthusiastic about the results and inspired by the techniques described by Ritchhart (2002). We therefore set out to develop the following three techniques.

#### **WWW**

We first sought to develop a technique that would prove useful for extended speaking

tasks, in which students discuss a topic for about a minute. We thought of *WWW*, an obvious reference to the World Wide Web, as a mnemonic device for *What you think, what you like, what you do, and other people too*. The idea behind it is that a student first gives an opinion on the topic, then says what he or she likes and does in relation to it, and finally extends it to other people. Our technique looked complex, but it was meant to address a complex task that requires students to produce a stretch of sustained discourse.

We knew that in spite of the steps involved in the technique, it would not provide us with a complete solution to our concern about sustained discourse; however, the technique would provide one way to get started and would help students gain confidence as they realized the ability to produce a relatively short piece of discourse, and it would lead to further development of sustained speech over time.

We again tried the before-and-after format and asked one student to talk about healthy breakfast habits. This is what he said before we demonstrated the technique:

“I have for breakfast coffee with milk and cookies in the morning. That doctors say it’s very important. My children eat cereals. Sometimes I don’t have many time and I only have a fruit.”

Here again, we did not correct mistakes. After the demonstration of the technique, he managed to structure his discourse more effectively:

*What you think*: “I think that breakfast is very important.”

*What you like*: “I like having coffee with milk and cookies.”

*What you do*: “Sometimes I don’t have breakfast because I haven’t many time and I only eat a fruit.”

*And other people too*: “My children eat healthy food like milk and cereals or yoghurt.”

We considered his answer quite satisfactory, although perhaps with further oral development we would insist on the production of a more complete piece of discourse. Still, our technique seemed to have worked. The second time that the student attempted to talk about the topic, his discourse was better organized.

In the rehearsal stage we explained the technique and wrote each part of it on the board as we elicited possible answers from the students. As this was a rather long technique, involving four steps instead of three, we found ourselves naturally gesturing as we said it. We pointed to our heads as we said, *What you think*; held our thumbs up for *What you like*; made a fast movement of our arms as if we were jogging for *What you do*; and made an outward movement of our hands for *And other people too*. In short, we acted out the technique, and we encouraged the students to do the same.

When we applied the technique in class, we demonstrated it as part of a game. With the students sitting in a circle, we announced that we were going to play an opinion game. We made slips of paper with topics written on them (e.g., video games, holidays with friends, living abroad). One student picked a slip and read the topic aloud. We explained that the rule of the game was that they had to give an opinion related to the topic by following four steps. We said and gestured the steps of the technique, then wrote them on the board. We demonstrated with one of the topics by eliciting possible answers from the students. Then we assigned turns clockwise in the circle and played the game. Students lost points by failing to follow all four steps or forgetting them. There were actually many points lost, but, most important of all, the students had fun checking that their classmates were actually applying all four steps in their opinions. The winner was the one with the highest score after the completion of several topics.

We found that the game helped the students remember the steps of the technique, just

as the bouncing ball had. We also found that the easiest way to incorporate the technique into daily classwork was to use it every time a new topic was introduced, particularly at the beginning of a unit. We used the technique with the topics of sports, free-time activities, keeping in touch with friends, and shopping habits, among others.

**Who, where, what, and why, you can have a try!**

In many courses, students do extensive reading of stories, and they may be required to talk about the stories in oral examinations. With children, this task is usually supported by pictures. Helping a ten-year-old student structure a description is undoubtedly a challenge, so we came up with a technique where pictures provide the main input for the students to talk about; we call it *picture-bound* to differentiate it from other techniques in which the pictures act as support. In other words, the technique is grounded on the situations in the pictures. Unlike in the rehearsal situation with the adult learners, we were unable to film the children due to legal matters (filming children requires their parents' formal consent).

The first picture-bound technique that we used was for descriptions. Let us take as an example a picture in any story that we may use with our students. Generally, pictures show one or several characters doing an action in a certain setting and at a certain time. This is the reason why the technique begins with *Who*, for "Who is in the picture?" Then comes *Where*, for "Where is the character?" Next is *What*, for "What is the character doing?" And finally there is *Why*, for "Why is the character doing that action?" We think that these four questions are enough for picture description, at least for the part that the students will attempt to produce on their own.

In a course for children, our students read a story about an American girl who makes a new friend while she is traveling with her parents in China. In one of the pictures, we see the scene of the girl catching the first glimpse of her friend-to-be in a crowd.

To introduce the technique, we offered an analogy. We told the students to imagine that they had a camera and that they were shooting the scene in the picture. We were the directors, so we were going to give them the instructions of what to film. We asked them to put their hands before their eyes as if they were holding a camera and then to look through the opening between their fingers as if it were the lens. They first had to make a close-up of who was in the scene and to say who they saw through the lens: "I can see an American girl and a Chinese girl in a crowd." Next, they had to step back a bit so that their cameras would show the whole place and to say what they saw through the lens: "It's a busy street in China." Now back to the girls—the students had to show what was happening and what they were doing: "The American girl is looking at the Chinese girl." Finally, their cameras had to linger on the scene for a few seconds so that they would say why the girl was doing that: "Because she wants to have a friend."

The filming analogy proved to be useful and enjoyable for the children. When we moved on to describe other pictures in the story, they remembered the steps little by little, and we were able to withdraw the director's orders. As a follow-up task, we asked the students to write down their descriptions and to add further information about the story. The outcome was a short composition.

**Now and next, I will pass this test!**

Another picture-bound technique we developed is *Now and next, I will pass this test!* This is a simple technique that seeks to encourage initial steps in a narrative by referring to two actions in chronological order. We tend to think of narrative as a sequence of actions sometime in the past. But of course, the narrative could as well be a sequence in the present, especially when the students have not learned the past tense yet. In this technique, however, our idea is to link a present event to a future event, thus producing a brief narrative sequence that helps the children see the cause-effect

relationship of two actions, one that happens in the present moment and another one that will happen soon in the story but to which the students refer in the present.

In the case of the story that we referred to above, a possible sequence would be: “The American girl looks at the Chinese girl. Next she says ‘hi’ to her in Chinese.” The students do not need to produce “Next she is going to say ‘hi’ to her in Chinese.” On the one hand, the children may not have learned how to refer to the future yet. On the other hand, it does not really matter because we are interested in the students’ awareness of how to connect two events chronologically to produce a short piece of discourse, to extend beyond the sentence and to begin to tell the story.

Once the students had practiced the *Who, where, what, and why* technique with several pictures in the story, we introduced the *Now and next* technique by enlarging the filming analogy. We told them that they were going to use their cameras to see beyond the picture into the story; we then modeled the narrative sequence and guided the students to voice other narrative sequences in the same story.

As a follow-up task, we played a memory game. We had slips of paper that detailed events in the story, and the students had to find matching pairs for *Now and next, I will pass this test!* The game allowed the children to become familiar with the events in the story and helped to keep raising their awareness of how to construct a chronological sequence. The matching pairs were posted with the corresponding pictures in the story for the students to have a clearer idea of actions and story development. For those matching pairs that had no corresponding pictures, we asked the children to draw the scenes. We assigned different matching pairs to different children

working in twos. The overall result was a much longer sequence of pictures, which included the students’ own drawings, each with their corresponding two-action narrative. The students were able to actually see most of the story in this summary-like chronology, which definitely helped them to remember the plot.

## RESULTS

The positive results we received after implementing the techniques in this article give us hope that other teachers will also find them beneficial. We gathered qualitative feedback and found that it correlated with our observations of student performance. Most of our students have been able to realize improvement in their oral performance. Some of them began by consciously using the techniques, and, sometime later, they forgot about using the technique altogether and seemed to gain enough confidence to depart from the deliberate scaffolding routines and conduct interactions more independently.

We have also received feedback from the teachers who applied the techniques in their lessons in a sustained manner. Apart from implementing the techniques ourselves, we taught them to about 30 teachers who attended sessions in our face-to-face forum at AEXALEVI. Many of these teachers reported having tried out the techniques in their lessons. Some teachers taught the techniques to different target groups of learners; that is, they did not teach the same students more than two techniques simultaneously. Other teachers carried out systematic work on the techniques, which were used to answer questions in class as part of larger speaking tasks or to perform the more specific task for which the techniques had been created. In both cases, teachers found that the students produced more organized oral discourse

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**Most of our students have been able to realize improvement in their oral performance.**

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and seemed more confident when facing a speaking challenge. The teachers agreed that the techniques were practical, to the point, and easy to teach and use. Above all, the teachers agreed that their students seem to be more confident about how to answer a specific task and that this confidence appears to have a positive impact on the students' fluency and accuracy. The students do not go about the tasks randomly but rather follow the routine signaled by a certain technique, which benefits those students who need more support and guidance in oral tasks.

Most teachers said that the two picture-bound techniques—*Who, where, what, and why, you can have a try!* and *Now and next, I will pass this test!*—were quite successful with children and encouraged younger learners to continue the writing tasks based on the oral discourse produced in relation to the pictures and the stories. In addition, the *Claim, Support, Question* technique seems to have been highly effective for interactive communication with teenagers and adults. Some adult learners reported using the technique as a guide at work when they take part in meetings because it helps them visualize how to organize their speaking turns. Although they had to depart from the technique in the course of the meetings, it gave them an overall structure for confidence in a somewhat stressful communicative situation.

## CONCLUSION

We hope that these techniques will contribute to shaping our students' thinking and, as a result, their oral discourse. In brief, if our students learn to conceive of ideas following a strategic organization reinforced by awareness-raising, modeling, and anchoring of the techniques by means of rhyme, gestures, movement, and analogy, then their discourse will be framed within the structure provided and away from random oral discourse. We do need to be aware that the development of oral discourse can occur only over time and requires a consistent approach by the teacher to contextualize work in the classroom, provide opportunities for interaction, and

offer assessment on the part of both the teacher and the students.

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# READER'S GUIDE

**T**his 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.

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## **Applied Theatre, Adolescent English Learners, and the Performance of Literacy (Pages 2–11)**

### **Pre-Reading**

- 1.** What issues do teachers of adolescent English language learners need to be aware of? How might these issues affect classroom motivation?
- 2.** What benefits do English language learners experience when they participate in classroom drama? Have you ever used dramatic techniques (improvised role plays, charades, etc.) in your class?

### **Post-Reading**

- 1.** In the “Context building: Co-creating wor(l)ds” section, the authors say: “Applied theatre engages everyday people as ‘spect-actors’ . . . .” What do the authors mean here? How does this concept apply to the techniques in this article?
- 2.** What books or short stories have you read that might work well with the techniques discussed in this article? Are there any traditional folktales in your culture that could be used to teach English?

## Engaging Students as Tutors, Trainers, and Leaders (Pages 12–20)

### Pre-Reading

Have you ever tutored someone or been tutored by another person? If yes, what did you think of the experience? If no, what questions would you have if someone asked you to tutor a student or peer?

### Post-Reading

1. Under Step 1 on page 13, the author discusses a cultural issue that influenced the creation of the tutoring program in the country she resided in. What cultural issues would you need to consider if you were setting up a tutoring program in your country?
2. What do you think would be the biggest obstacle in retaining tutors in your country over a long period of time?
3. If you started a tutoring program, what questions do you think the parents of students would have?
4. If you wanted to start a tutoring program, who could the tutors be? Whom would they tutor? Where could the tutoring sessions be held? How could you get the program started?

## On How Thinking Shapes Speaking: Techniques to Enhance Students' Oral Discourse (Pages 21–29)

### Pre-Reading

Are there any techniques you like to use when teaching extended speaking or oral discourse? Have you used any specific methods for helping students organize their speech?

### Post-Reading

1. In the section called “Strategies to structure oral discourse,” the authors state: “Our efforts in the classroom are based on helping students think and act strategically . . . .” Do you agree with the authors? If so, how does thinking and acting strategically connect with other issues such as teaching grammar and vocabulary?
2. Which technique from this article would work best in your classroom? If you used it, how would you follow up or extend it?

## Nouns on the Job Market: An Approach for Recognizing Noun Position Errors

by SANDRA TOMPSON ISSA



As an English as a foreign language instructor, you don't have to look at too many student writing samples before you see sentences like this:

1. \*The boy he went to the store.
2. \*The first situation, the girl loses her purse.
3. \*That is the boy who I know him.
4. \*That is the boy went to the store.

At first, these sentences seem to represent disparate grammatical problems. The first sentence could be interpreted as a subject

issue, the second might be a prepositional phrase problem, and the third and fourth might reflect a lack of mastery of adjective clauses. However, dealing with these issues separately is time-consuming and redundant when they can all be subsumed under an overarching category of noun position. In fact, an understanding of noun positions in sentences can correct many recurring problems in the writing of English language learners. This article outlines an approach for anticipating and preventing these sorts of errors while providing a framework to explain the errors to students. For this approach to be successful, students need to have an understanding of parts of speech, so it works best with low-intermediate to advanced students.

To address this topic, you can start by introducing an analogy, something like this:

Instructor: Yichen, what are you planning to study at university?

Yichen: Architectural engineering.

Instructor: And what kind of job do you want?

Yichen: I want to work in my father's construction company—building bridges.

Continue to question students, always leading them to say that having one job is the ideal situation. After inquiring about the job plans of several students, you circle back to Yichen.

Instructor: Yichen, you want to be an architectural engineer, right?

Yichen: That's right.

Instructor: Do you want to be an architectural engineer *and* a teacher?

Yichen: No. Just an engineer.

Instructor: So you only want *one* job?

Yichen: Yes, just one job.

Instructor: So, are you saying that one job is enough and that two jobs are too many?

Yichen: Yes!

Sum up by saying, “Nouns are like people—they only want one job. But nouns can't just be whatever they want to be. There are a limited number of jobs that a noun can fill.”

From here, students need to be introduced to the “job possibilities” for nouns. Look at nouns as subjects, objects of verbs, objects of prepositions, and complements and the corresponding positions they can take in

sentences (see Table 1). A little simplification makes the information accessible to students with a wide range of English proficiencies. For example, possessives are omitted, indirect and direct objects are grouped together under the term “Object of Verb,” and only subject complements, and not object complements, are addressed. Depending on the students' level, Table 1 can be expanded to include these other noun roles.

When you present Table 1, leave the second and third columns blank so you can elicit this information from students. It's best to use the same noun for all the examples, allowing students to focus on how the noun moves around the sentence in various positions. In Table 1, the students have used *pizza* in all the examples.

Job of the Noun	Position in the Sentence	Example
Subject	<i>before the verb</i>	<i>Pizza is popular in this country.</i>
Object of Verb	<i>after the verb</i>	<i>I ate the pizza.</i>
Object of Preposition	<i>after the preposition</i>	<i>There's pepperoni on the pizza.</i>
Complement	<i>after a linking verb</i>	<i>It's a pizza!</i>

**Table 1. Noun jobs and corresponding sentence positions**

Students need to know what linking verbs are and to understand that there may be intervening words between the noun and the other part of speech used as a point of reference in the position column. In addition, if you are using (and students are writing) multi-clause sentences, they will need to understand that each clause will have its own subject and verb, minimally.

After you work through the table, provide students with sentences in which they need to identify the job of the noun. To scaffold this activity, begin with sentences, like the examples in Table 1, that focus on the same noun.

1. Subject (S): That book is boring!
2. Object of Verb (OoV): I didn't read the book until I was in college.

3. Object of Preposition (OoP):  
In the book, you'll find discussion questions.
4. Complement (C): There are ten new books on the shelf.
5. Complement (C): My essay for this class is becoming a book!

Students need practice like this periodically to keep them thinking about the jobs of nouns in sentences. From here, an open-ended exercise provides students with a greater challenge. Students analyze each sentence by underlining all the nouns and then identifying their jobs. Refer to Table 1 to address any misunderstandings. A final product might look like this:

1. There is snow on the trees.  
C OoP
2. She is meeting me at the library after class.  
S OoV OoP OoP
3. On Monday, our first assignment is due.  
OoP S
4. My brother ate breakfast late, so he doesn't want lunch yet.  
S OoV S OoV
5. I can't talk now because I forgot my homework, and I'm trying to redo it before class.  
S S OoV S OoV OoP

This preparatory work enables you to explain errors to students when they begin turning in writing assignments. In fact, even before you deal with student-generated errors, it is useful to spend time going over problematic sentences. The example sentences from the beginning of this article provide fodder for identifying errors.

When students underline the nouns and determine the job of each noun in the first sentence (\*“The boy he went to the store”), they discover that one noun is left without a job. *Store* is happily employed as the object of a preposition, and, if *boy* is fulfilling the job of subject, then *he* is left with no job at all. Add humor to the analogy by explaining that students are looking at the bleak case of an unemployed noun. Even worse, they are seeing firsthand a noun trying to steal a job from another noun that is already in the position.

The analysis of the second sentence (\*“The first situation, the girl loses her purse”) should identify *girl* as a subject and *purse* as an object of the verb. *Situation*, however, has no job, so, as in the first sentence, we see an unemployed noun. This case differs, though, in that the noun here is not trying to fill a job that has already been taken. We can gainfully employ that noun by adding a preposition to the beginning of the sentence. This allows *situation* to work as the object of a preposition. Students need to understand that, when they are faced with an unemployed noun, the question must be: Is this noun trying to fill a job that is already taken? In such cases, the nouns will most likely refer to the same entity—for example, *he* and *boy* in the first sentence—and one of the nouns can be deleted. If the noun is not trying to take the place of another noun that is already in the coveted position, students should determine whether a job for the noun can logically be created.

The third sentence is more complicated because of the fronting of a relative pronoun in an adjective clause, but, in essence, it parallels the first example. Students might need help, but the analysis reveals the following:

- \*That is the boy who I know him.  
S C OoV S OoV

Here, as in the first sentence, two nouns are vying for the same job. Sometimes this is possible, such as when a sentence has a compound object, but compound objects

refer to different entities and are joined by some type of conjunction (e.g., “I know him [OoV] and her [OoV]”). In the third sentence, however, the nouns *who* and *him* are referring to the same entity (“boy”). One of them has to go.

An analysis of the fourth sentence (“That is the boy went to the store”) reveals *That* as the subject and *store* as the object of the preposition, but what about *boy*? Is it a complement to the linking verb *is*, or is it the subject of *went*? This overworked noun is struggling to fill two jobs! It needs help. And help can be introduced in the form of a relative pronoun (*who*) at the front of an adjective clause.

This fourth sentence shows us another way to look at these sentences. The class discussion starts like this:

Instructor: Luis, what if the accountant at a company left to take another job. Would the company leave the position empty?

Luis: Of course not. They would hire someone.

Instructor: So, important jobs should not be left empty, right?

Luis: That’s right.

That is the segue into the idea that certain jobs in a sentence *must* be filled. Verbs need subjects (unless they are “understood,” as with imperatives); transitive verbs need objects, as do prepositions; and linking verbs need complements (although they could be adjectives instead of nouns). Therefore, we can say that nouns need a job (one job—no more and no less), and we can also say that job positions need to be filled. This concept can be viewed from the perspective of the potential employee (the noun) or from the potential job opening (the position that needs to be filled). When checking a sentence, students could begin with the first approach, checking the nouns to make sure that the nouns are adequately employed. Alternatively, students could begin by looking at positions and then making sure a noun is filling each

position. If students take this position-oriented approach, the focus must shift to the other parts of speech in the sentence and their characteristics and requirements. The easiest place to start is by finding the verb and then looking for its subject. After checking that the subject position is filled, students need to check whether the verb is transitive and needs an object or whether it is linking and needs a complement. If students identify a preposition, they must make sure that the preposition has an object.

The checklist below can help students through this type of analysis.

### POSITION CHECK STEPS

**Verb check 1:** Find the verb(s) in the sentence. Check each verb separately.

- Does the verb have a subject?
  - o If yes, does it have more than one subject?
    - If yes, do the subjects refer to different entities (e.g., *he* and *she*)?
    - If not, delete one of the subjects.
  - o If not, write a noun in the subject position (unless the verb is an imperative).

**Verb check 2:** Look at each verb again.

- Is it transitive?
  - o If yes, does it have an object?
    - If yes, does it have more than one object?
    - If yes, do the objects refer to different entities?
    - If not, delete one of the objects.

—If not, write a noun in the object of verb position.

- Is it a linking verb?
  - If yes, does it have a complement?

—If not, write a noun in the complement position.

**Preposition check:** Find the preposition(s) in the sentence.

- Does it have an object?
  - If not, write a noun in the object of preposition position.

**Final check:**

- Did you write the same noun for any of the answers above?
  - If yes, this noun is doing two jobs. Add another noun, or delete the extra position.

A “reverse analysis” of the fourth sentence (\*“That is the boy went to the store”) would look like this:

**POSITION CHECK STEPS: “That is the boy went to the store.”**

**Verb check 1:** Find the verb(s) in the sentence. Check each verb separately:  
*is, went*

- Does the verb have a subject?  
*Yes: That is; the boy went.*
  - If yes, does it have more than one subject? *No.*

**Verb check 2:** Look at each verb again.

- Is it transitive?  
*No, neither verb is transitive.*
- Is it a linking verb?  
*Yes: is.*

- If yes, does it have a complement?  
*Yes: “boy.”*

**Preposition check:** Find the preposition(s) in the sentence: *to*

- Does it have an object?  
*Yes, “store.”*

**Final check:**

- Did you write the same noun for any of the answers above?  
*Yes: “boy.”*
  - If yes, this noun is doing two jobs. Add another noun, or delete the extra position. *There is a problem with boy. It is in both the complement position and the subject position.*

Neither analysis provides students with the correct answer, but each directs students’ attention to problems. Once students work through enough sample sentences, then common errors, the environments in which they occur, and their solutions will become evident. For instance, when a noun is working as both a complement and a subject, as in the fourth sentence, the solution is to keep the noun in complement position and add a relative pronoun to fill the subject position. This sort of complement/subject mistake frequently occurs when students begin sentences with “there is” or “there are.” It does not matter whether students first run the noun check or first run the position check, but checking in both of these ways is necessary to cover all the noun position issues that can arise.

To sum up the noun check process, we can refer to this checklist:

### NOUN CHECK STEPS

1. Find all the nouns in the sentence.
2. Identify the job(s) of each noun.
3. If you find a noun that has no job,

- a. remove the noun if it is redundant, *or*
  - b. create a job for the noun if it is necessary to the sentence.
- 4.** If you find a noun that is working two jobs,
- a. add a noun to take on one of the jobs, *or*
  - b. terminate the extra job.

In writing classes, I have found that spending time going over these concepts at the beginning of a semester makes explanations move along more quickly when these issues arise later. Viewing the issues as noun position

errors provides a framework that encompasses multiple error types, thus giving the students a powerful tool to carry out of the classroom. Using the employment analogy provides a fun and memorable way to help students relate to this sentence-level grammatical concept. Of course, you can't anthropomorphize every grammatical concept, but this tactic works well for explaining noun positions to students.

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# Teaching Descriptive Writing through Visualization and the Five Senses

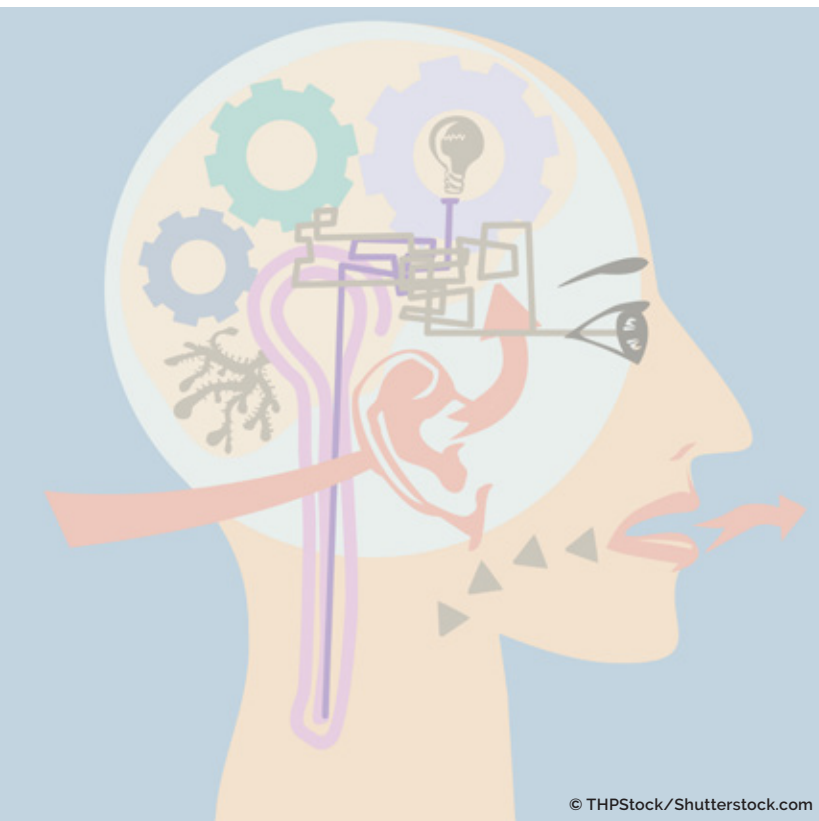
by KATHERINE CARTER

The descriptive paragraph and subsequent essay are usually among the first assignments students must complete in composition classes. Typically, students are told to describe their childhood home, a person of importance, a special object, or a summer vacation. Most students, especially learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), have difficulty beginning the assignment. In 2014, I was teaching an intermediate-level English class to first-year university students in Namibia, and after observing my students' struggles with writing a descriptive essay, I searched for techniques to implement in class. I found that visualization based on the five senses—what we touch, see, smell, hear, and taste—can be used as a technique to get ideas down on paper. This technique could be useful for teachers in a variety of EFL teaching contexts, from primary school to university, and can be used with a

wide range of texts that are particularly vivid and that stimulate the senses.

## IN MY CLASSROOM

Wilhelm (2008) states that once students see something in their minds, they find it much easier to write about. In addition, visualization based on the five senses can engage students and improve writing skills. In my class of 25 learners in Namibia, we first read a short text together. Reading before we wrote captured my students' attention. I like to select short poems and short stories that are especially colorful and tap into our senses, and in the class, I chose *All the Places to Love* by Patricia MacLachlan. *All the Places to Love* describes special places in the countryside through the eyes of a young boy. Once I chose the text, we were ready to apply the techniques outlined later in this article.



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**As we read the story together, I encouraged students to visualize, allowing the words to become pictures that they saw.**

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Having activated their background experiences, I encouraged my students to describe childhood pastimes, special times with family, or memorable events. We added details, facts, emotions, and new vocabulary to our discussion.

Next I asked students to think of a place they loved or that was special to them. At that point, most already had a place in mind, but I modeled an example from my own experience for those who needed more support. I closed my eyes and pictured the small town of Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, during the Christmas season. Using my senses to play a “movie” in my mind, I described the scene like this: “I see people dressed in white, walking to church and tending their stews on the open fire. I can smell the eucalyptus trees and the incense and the fires burning. I hear the priests’ call for church and the beating of the drum. I feel the cool air coming off the nearby lake. I taste the spicy meat sauce and homemade bread and the strong, sweet coffee.”

Then it was the students’ turn. I had them copy the chart in Figure 1 and take brief notes on what they see, smell, hear, taste, and feel in a place they love. After completing the chart, students talked about their notes with a partner. Based on their conversations, students added details, thoughts, and emotions to their notes. Then I asked students to find a new partner and again talk about their special place, based on their notes. After their second conversations, they added more details to their charts.

Visualizing the pictures in their minds as they read, describing their personal experiences,

As we read the story together, I encouraged students to visualize, allowing the words to become pictures that they saw. I also had students underline phrases in the text that connected to one of their five senses. When we finished reading, I asked students to share with a partner what they underlined and what they saw in their minds—what spoke to them. I allowed a few minutes for those exchanges, then opened up the discussion to the whole class. “What did you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel when reading this piece?” I asked. Typically, after a short silence, students opened up and shared parts of the story that appealed to their senses.

Then I redirected the discussion by asking, “Does any part of the story remind you of something from your own life?” This question opened the floodgates. Students described anecdotes and memories from their childhood, their villages, and their families. Some recalled their favorite pastime as a child—for one of my students, it was driving donkey carts and delivering wood.

and completing the chart gave students support to write. With their extended notes and details, they had the tools to write a descriptive paragraph or essay.

### REFLECTIONS ON THIS TECHNIQUE

Reading a colorful short story or short poem before writing turns on thinking skills (Wilhelm 2008) and allows students to become interested in the topic. In this activity, students find descriptive expressions from a piece that speaks to their senses. Guiding students to visualize as they read gives them confidence; it also helps them learn to think as they write. Most of us already visualize as we read, but our students may need encouragement to do so (Dinkins 2007). Talking about their visualizations and personal memories allows students to discover and share what was meaningful to them from the text. Meanwhile, the text has become significant to them, as their background experiences have been activated. Instead of confronting an arbitrary list of topics for a descriptive essay, students have made a connection with a story. That connection offers them something interesting to write about, whether it is driving donkey carts and delivering wood or something else.

Students will build on visual references they already have. They will bring to the piece their life experience, which for every learner will be different (Rosenblatt 2005). My students built on their personal experiences and visual references when they discussed childhood memories. EFL learners have numerous and rich life experiences. Teachers can keep looking for ways to help students tap into those experiences and bring them to paper.

### IN YOUR CLASSROOM

The following is a step-by-step description of the technique.

**Time needed:** 45 minutes for the technique; additional time for writing and revising

**Preparation:** Choose any text that is particularly vivid and taps into the senses. In addition to *All the Places to Love*, examples could be *Acquainted with the Night* by Robert Frost, *A Pizza the Size of the Sun* by Jack Prelutsky, or *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen. Write the chart for visualizing the senses (Figure 1) on the board and have students copy it.

Think of a special place or a place you love	
1.	List things that you see:
2.	List things that you hear:
3.	List things that you feel:
4.	List things that you smell:
5.	List things that you taste:

**Figure 1. Chart for visualizing the senses**

### Procedure:

**Step 1:** With your class, read the text you have chosen. Have students underline phrases that catch their attention based on their five senses. (If students do not have a copy of the text, ask them to write down phrases or details that activate their senses. In this case, students might have to listen to the text a second time.) Afterwards, ask

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**EFL learners have numerous and rich life experiences. Teachers can keep looking for ways to help students tap into those experiences and bring them to paper.**

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students to share with a partner what they underlined. Next, ask students to share their visualizations with the whole class, saying: “What did you see in your mind as you were reading the story? Describe that picture.”

**Step 2:** Direct students to the chart on the board. Give the class an example of a place you love. Describe the place with reference to your five senses. Then ask students to visualize a place they love and to take brief notes in the charts in their notebooks. Tell students to focus on an image of their special place that they want to communicate to the reader.

**Step 3:** Have students discuss the notes in their charts with a partner. Then ask students to return to their charts and, based on their conversations, add details, thoughts, and emotions.

**Step 4:** Ask students to find a new partner and again, based on their notes, describe their special place. Following their second conversation, have them add more details to their charts.

**Step 5:** Give students time to write a paragraph based on the notes they took. (Instead of a paragraph, intermediate-level classes can write an essay.)

**Step 6:** Arrange students in pairs so they can read their paragraph aloud to a partner. Before students begin reading, tell them that listening partners will be expected to ask the readers questions and make comments on the piece. Encourage the readers to take notes on what their partners say. After students discuss the first partner’s piece, have them switch roles.

**Step 7:** When pairs have finished their discussions, have students revise what they wrote, basing revisions on their classmates’ questions and comments.

**Step 8:** Pair students with new partners and have them read their revisions and discuss them as before.

**Step 9:** Have students revise their pieces again. The final draft of the paragraph can be turned in during the following class.

**Final point:** Remember, once students see something in their minds, they have a much easier time writing about it.

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# MY CLASSROOM PERU

**A**ngela Huanca Barrantes is a highly respected teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the La Pampa neighborhood in the city of Ilo, and she has a strong impact on the lives of students at the Admirante Miguel Grau secondary school and at Centro Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, one of four binational centers in southern Peru.



Two students in Ms. Huanca's class present a dialogue for their peers.

**I am able to share what I have learned with others. It has a multiplying effect.**

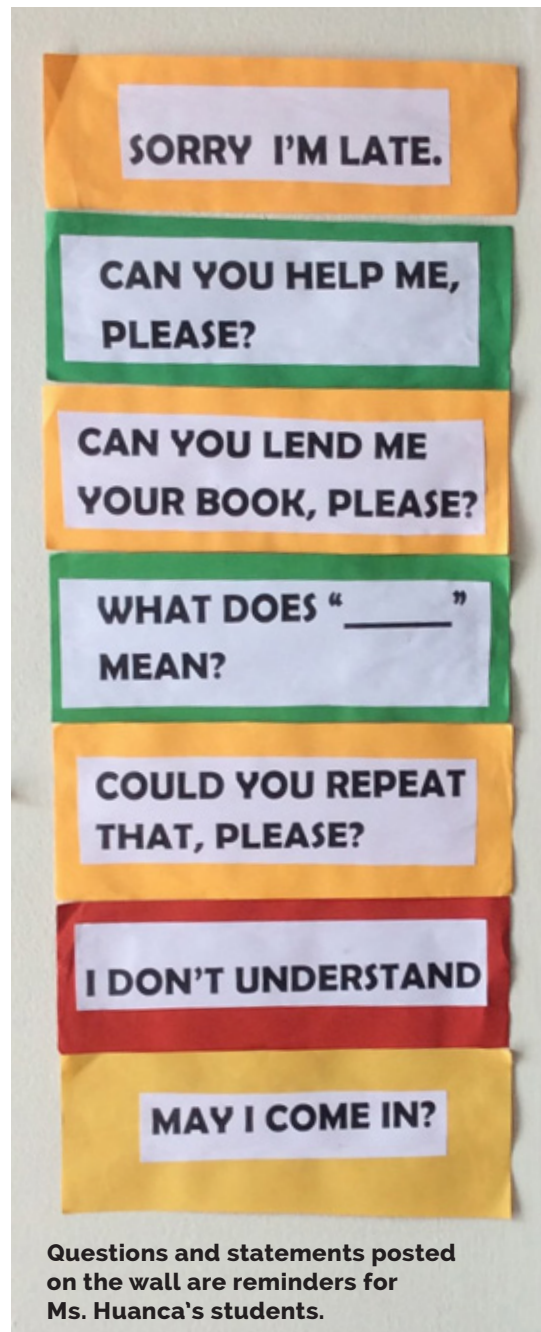
Yet Ms. Huanca did not always like English. In fact, she admits that at one time she disliked it because she did not understand it. Her feelings changed when, as an undergraduate student majoring in tourism at the National University of Saint Augustine, she enrolled in an English class taught by Rosa Sifuentes, who inspired Ms. Huanca to not only open her mind and heart to the English language, but also to one day share this newfound love. According to Ms. Huanca, “Teachers like Ms. Sifuentes inspire you to always continue learning, and I am still learning.” During her fourth year of university studies, Ms. Huanca worked at the university’s Language Center, and she realized then that as a teacher she could have a positive and important impact on others.

After graduating, she received a scholarship from the U.S. embassy in Lima to take a course at Georgetown University designed for EFL teachers. She, along with 17 other Peruvian EFL public school teachers, participated in the Rising Star program, which, she said, “changed my life.” Through the program, Ms. Huanca also attended training at the Centro Espiral Mana in Costa Rica, which she described as life-altering due to the holistic approach to education that the center promotes. “The center’s philosophy is based on what you as the teacher can do to serve your students so that they have the best learning experience possible,” she said, “and that really resonated with me. Being there was a healing experience.”

“My life as a teacher changed the day I became a Rising Star,” Ms. Huanca said. “It opened many doors and helped me channel my interests and to be able to share with others and learn from others, too. The embassy planted a seed in many teachers when they committed to the Rising Star program, and I am one of those seeds because I am able to

share what I have learned with others. It has a multiplying effect. We need to keep training more English teachers.”

Originally inspired by her teacher, Ms. Huanca now gets inspiration from her students. She is proud of the strong relationships she has with them—relationships built on mutual respect and trust. She believes a good teacher not only imparts knowledge and a love for learning, but also listens to



students and is empathetic to their struggles. She has learned that she should never make assumptions about her students, as that will inhibit her from truly being able to connect with them and help them learn.

She tells people how proud she is of her students and how honored she is to be their teacher. Ms. Huanca's family, like those of her students, is from the highlands of Peru. She and her students are second-generation immigrants from the highlands, and their grandparents learned Spanish as a second language; their native languages are Quechua and Aymara.

Ms. Huanca is aware that learning English is a challenge for some of her students, especially when their parents are not involved in their learning because their top priority is making sure the students' basic needs are met. Still, she chose to work at the Admirante Miguel Grau school because she knows how crucial it is that her students feel that they are special, take pride in how rich their culture is, are proud of who they are and where they come from, and believe that anything is possible.

"The problem is not the students," Ms. Huanca said, "it is the people who judge them and underestimate them. My students are fantastic. Every day I strive to figure out what else I can do to make them shine. My students know that I care, I love them, and I think that they appreciate me. I listen to them."

Ms. Huanca, along with her colleague María Nuñez, recently completed a six-week course on methodology at

Arizona State University on a scholarship from the Peruvian Ministry of Education. Ms. Huanca is pleased that her government is invested in improving the way Peruvians teach and learn English. "Things are changing in a positive way," she said. "The government realizes how important English is and how it is a way to bridge the gap between the different populations in Peru."

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**I get inspired by my students, by observing them and seeing what does and doesn't work.**

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María Nuñez (left) and Angela Huanca Barrantes, the only two EFL teachers at Admirante Miguel Grau school, share a close working relationship.

Ms. Huanca typically spends her mornings and afternoons teaching EFL at the Admirante Miguel Grau public school and her evenings teaching at the binational center. She and Ms. Nuñez were allocated a special room for teaching English, but the school is now under reconstruction, and that room has been turned into storage space. "We do not know when we will get it back," she said. But that hasn't deterred Ms. Huanca, and she works

diligently to create meaningful lessons for the 12 groups of 40 high school students that she teaches for 90 minutes a week. She said that when she started teaching, she tried to cover as

much material as possible, as required by the Ministry of Education, but her data indicated that she was not helping her students become successful in their learning.

Due to the frustration that she saw on her students' faces and that she felt as well, Ms. Huanca knew it was imperative that she drastically change the way she was teaching.



**Students relax in the courtyard of the Admirante Miguel Grau school.**

**My students are fantastic. Every day I strive to figure out what else I can do to make them shine.**

She began by implementing strategies that allowed her students to own the language instead of simply memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures. She does this by using cooperative learning strategies, such as pair work and jigsaw activities. To capture and maintain her students' interest in learning, she incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities into her daily lessons.

Knowing how important student feedback is, Ms. Huanca uses a variety of formative assessments throughout each class. She does what she calls a “wrap-up” at the end of each activity to find out whether her students have grasped the concept being taught and practiced. She also has her students answer self-assessment questions at the end of every class to see whether she needs to review the material or whether students are ready to move on. These formative assessments are essential to her lesson planning and the success of her students.

Ms. Huanca's classroom consists of a small blackboard, 40 student desks (some in a state of disrepair), and a small table that serves as her desk. She uses a variety of visual aids, realia, and donated books and materials from the U.S. embassy to enhance her teaching. She and Ms. Nuñez develop their own lessons.

“I get inspired by my students, by observing them and seeing what does and doesn't work, and then I am able to adapt my lessons to better assist them in their learning,” she said.

Ms. Huanca prides herself on being able to provide her students with a variety of

activities—especially those designed to develop speaking skills—that make students feel comfortable enough to take risks and speak freely about the topic at hand. “I always think about my students' needs and what activities will work best with them based on their age,” she said.

In a high school classroom of 40 students, one might expect that chaos, not learning, would prevail. But Ms. Huanca maintains an environment conducive to learning while also allowing students to have fun. Hers is a classroom built on mutual respect, appreciation, and—above all—teaching with an open heart and an open mind.

Her students believe it is important to learn English because it is fundamental to their lives, and many of them would like to travel to the United States and want to be able to speak with Americans. One student said, “Our teacher is interesting, fantastic, motivating, understanding, patient, and wants the best for us.”

It is not easy to win over the hearts and minds of 480 teenagers, but Ms. Huanca certainly has.

This article was written by **Deanna Paglia**, an English and Spanish second language teacher and teacher trainer who is currently the English Language Fellow hosted by Centro Cultural Peruano Norteamericano in Arequipa, Peru.

Photos by Deanna Paglia

**T**his section presents a stand-alone language-learning activity emphasizing speaking. Specifically, students will participate in role plays to describe occupations and job-related duties.

# Role-Play Party: Talking about Jobs

**LEVEL:** Upper Beginner or Low Intermediate

**PREPARATION:**

**TIME REQUIRED:** 45–60 minutes

**GOALS:** To ask and answer small-talk questions about jobs; to practice using language related to greetings, introductions, and taking leave

**MATERIALS:** Chalk and blackboard, or markers and whiteboard; paper and pencils or pens; role-play character cards and graphic organizers (see Preparation section for details); timing device; overhead or digital projector (optional)

**OVERVIEW:** Students will role-play being at a party with assigned character names and job titles. Several role-play parties occur in the classroom at the same time. Party “guests” must introduce themselves and ask one another about their jobs; they are encouraged to have fun and be dramatic. Students can refer to supporting language information on the board, if needed, but they do not follow a script. When the parties end, students use a graphic organizer to write down details they remember about the other guests and their jobs, then discuss and compare the information they collected. Scaffolding options for lower-level students and students who might not be familiar with small-talk functions are provided at the end of the activity.

1. Before class, use small pieces of card stock or paper to prepare character cards.

- During the role play, students will work in groups of 6. Each student in a group will need a unique character card. For example, in a class of 42 students working in groups of 6, you would need to prepare 7 sets of 6 character cards; the different roles in each set can be the same from group to group. (Forming groups of 4 or 8 students is also acceptable; however, with groups of 8, students will have to remember more information in the final phase of the activity.)

- Each character card should contain a job title along with a male and a female character name; students will pick the name that matches their gender.

- The jobs you include on the character cards are limited only by your imagination, your teaching context, and the students’ proficiency.

Examples are:

doctor	police officer
hotel clerk	pilot
teacher	politician



Police officer

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- |              |                    |
|--------------|--------------------|
| lawyer       | singer             |
| engineer     | shopkeeper         |
| astronaut    | hairstylist/barber |
| tour guide   | flight attendant   |
| travel agent | zookeeper          |

Name: *Frank* (male) / *Francine* (female)

Job: *firefighter*

**Sample character card**

If you like, you can customize the jobs to make them specific to your local environment:

*English teacher at [the name of your school],  
clerk at [the name of a local hotel], and so on.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (male) / \_\_\_\_\_ (female)

Job: \_\_\_\_\_

**Blank character card**

2. Make and copy three-column graphic organizers that students can use to record details about other guests after the party ends. (If you prefer, students can draw their own organizers during the activity.) The first column provides space for each student's real name, the second column for the character's name, and the third column for details about the character's job.

## Graphic Organizer: Party Guest Information

Student name	Character name	Job title and details
(Example) <i>Carlo</i>	<i>Frank</i>	<i>Firefighter – wears yellow uniform, likes to help people, works in a fire station</i>

- 3.** To save time during the activity, consider writing the job-description questions on the board in advance and covering them with a large piece of paper (see Procedures, Step 4). Or, if you have an overhead or digital projector, you could prepare the text in advance and display it as needed during the activity. If you use the Scaffolding steps outlined at the end of the activity, you might also prepare in advance the Small-Talk Function Chart and the dialogue between Frank and Paul.

### PROCEDURES:

- 1.** Tell students they are going to pretend to attend a party, and each student will play the role of a party guest. Explain that people at this party don't know each other, and therefore guests must introduce themselves to one another. Also, tell students that each person must learn about the other party guests' jobs by asking them at least two questions about their work. Let students know that they must try to remember as many details as possible about each guest they meet.
- 2.** Explain that before the party starts, students will receive information about their character and job, and that they will have time to think about their character and information related to the job.
- 3.** Put students into groups of 6. Ask a student volunteer to pass out the sets of character cards, giving one set facedown to each group. In each group, students should pass the stack of cards around, taking one card without looking at it.
- 4.** When all students have a card, ask them to look at it without showing it to anyone else. Explain that students should choose the name on the card that matches their gender and that when the party starts, they will pretend they have the occupation written on the card. Tell students they will prepare to play their character's role at the party by thinking about answers to the questions displayed on the board:
  - What is your job? What type of work do you do?
  - What do you do at work?
  - What do you wear to work?
  - Where do you work? (Describe the building or location.)
  - What kinds of people and other things do you see at work?
  - Is your work dangerous? ... boring? ... fun? ... difficult? ... interesting?
  - What do you like about your job? What do you dislike?
  - Did you go to a special school or training course for your job?

5. Model the character preparation process by doing a “think-aloud” about an example character not used in the student cards. Use level-appropriate examples, make notes on the board during the process, and elicit information from students when possible. For instance, after you look at your example card, your think-aloud might go something like this:

“My name is Frank, and I’m a firefighter. Hmm ... what do I do at work? I fight fires. I put water on fires ... . What else? [*Ask students.*]

“Ah, yes, I help people. What clothes do I wear? I wear a uniform. [*Ask students what color the uniform is.*]

“Yes, a bright yellow uniform ... and a special hat ... . What is it called? [*Ask students.*]

“That’s right; a helmet. Where do I work? Hmm ... a building for firefighters ... what is that place called again? [*Ask students.*]

“Oh, right, a fire station ... . What does my character’s voice sound like? Hmm ... maybe a deep voice like this [*demonstrate a deep voice*] ... Hi, my name is Frank. Nice to meet you. ...”

(*Note:* If you are female, you can replace “Frank” with “Francine” and adjust the character information, if necessary, as you perform the think-aloud.)

6. Give students a few minutes to consider the character description questions. Tell students they can make notes during this preparation stage, but they can’t use the notes during the party. Remind them they can be dramatic and “get into character” during the party by adopting a different voice or by walking or standing in a way that matches their character. You might ask questions like these: “How

does your character talk? How does your character walk? What gestures does your character make?”

7. Ask student volunteers to pass out the character graphic organizers. (If students are making the graphic organizers, guide them through the process.) Explain that after the party ends, students will use the graphic organizers to record what they remember about each character they met. Remind students they will not make or use notes during the parties. Model filling out the organizer by using details from your demonstration character, Frank or Francine.
8. Before starting the parties, give students a minute or two to review the notes they made about their characters. Remind students to:
- Meet all the other party guests and ask them at least two questions about their jobs
  - Try to remember as many details as they can about each character
  - Have fun while playing their character
9. Establish “party locations” for each group in different areas of the classroom, and set a time limit for how long the parties should last (approximately ten minutes, depending on the group size). Ask students to leave their notes and graphic organizers at their desks, and then ask students to get up and go to their designated areas.
10. Start the parties. Walk around, monitor student performances, and provide support, when requested, by referring students to language examples on the board. You might want to make notes about language or communication issues you observe for use in a whole-class feedback session at the end of the activity.

11. When three minutes are left in the parties, give students a verbal warning such as, “Only three minutes left. Try to meet all of the party guests.”
12. When time is up, end the parties and ask students to return to their seats. Ask students to use their graphic organizers to write down all the information they can remember about the other party guests. Tell them it is okay if they can’t remember everything; they should just do their best.
13. After a few minutes, direct groups to work together to discuss each character at the party. Ask someone in each group to volunteer to be the discussion leader. For each student, the discussion leader will ask the group members to supply the character’s name and all the details they can remember about the character’s job. Tell students to add any

missing details to their charts during the discussions.

14. If you want, after the group discussions, conduct a whole-class review of the role plays. Ask all the students who played each character to stand up or raise their hands, and then ask students from a few groups to share details about the character and his or her job. You might ask questions like these:

- Would everyone who played Mark or Maria the shopkeeper please stand up?
- What did you all learn about Mark or Maria’s job?
- How did this character act during the party?

Because students in different groups may have provided different character details or acted differently, students can



Firefighter

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compare and contrast information from other groups with information about their own group's character.

- 15.** In addition to the role-play character discussion, to close out the activity, you can review with the class any small-talk, grammatical, or vocabulary-related issues you noted while observing the students' improvised conversations.

## VARIATIONS

### More drama!

If you want to make the role-play parties more dramatic and character-driven, add a "character mood" or "character description" note to each character card during the preparation phase (Step 1 under Preparation). For example, a character card might say:

Name: *Frank* (male) / *Francine* (female)

Job: *Firefighter*

Character description: *grumpy* [or *shy, sad, very happy, tired, nervous, etc.*]

The additional information encourages students to use vocabulary knowledge about moods and personalities while planning and developing their character's voice and behavior. Include a fourth column called "Character personality" on the graphic organizer so students can note their observations about each party guest's behavior and mood during the party.

### Notes support

Some students might find it too challenging to have unscripted conversations and then remember the details from the conversations they have had with several party guests. If this is the case in your class, allow students to take the graphic organizers to the party and make brief notes after each conversation. Students can revise their notes, adding any details they remember after the party, prior to the group discussions. Be sure to extend the time allotted for the party conversations if you choose this variation.

## SCAFFOLDING

### Small talk

If your students have practiced "small talk" in English, you might be able to skip these

**Small-Talk Function Chart**

Introductions/Greetings — Starting the Conversation	Acknowledgement Statements — Keeping the Conversation Going	Taking Leave — Ending the Conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi, my name is _____.</li> <li>• I'm _____.</li> <li>• Nice to meet you, _____ / Nice to meet you, too.</li> <li>• Hi, _____, how are you?</li> <li>• Isn't this a great party?</li> <li>• Are you having a good time?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I see. / Oh, I see.</li> <li>• That's interesting. / How interesting!</li> <li>• Oh, really?</li> <li>• That's great.</li> <li>• That sounds fun / exciting / difficult, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was nice talking to you. / I enjoyed talking to you.</li> <li>• It was nice to meet you.</li> <li>• I'll see you later. / See you later.</li> <li>• Have a good time. / Have a good time at the party, _____.</li> <li>• Enjoy the party!</li> <li>• Bye. / Good-bye.</li> </ul>

*Note:* This chart does not cover all small-talk functions; a limited number of examples are provided here for upper-beginner/lower-intermediate learners.

scaffolding steps or to review them quickly. If your students are unfamiliar with small talk, take time to explain that short conversations people have at parties or in other settings are examples of small talk. Ask students to give you examples of other times or places small talk can occur (waiting for a bus, waiting in line at a store, etc.).

Tell students that small talk often has three parts: starting a conversation, keeping the conversation going, and ending the conversation. On the board, display the Small-Talk Function Chart. Ask students to identify examples of the different functions in a sample dialogue (you might want to use the dialogue between Frank and Paul, below), underline examples they identify in the dialogue on the board, and emphasize that the pieces of information in the chart can be combined

during a short conversation. Ask students to provide additional examples to the chart under each functional category. You can keep the Small-Talk Function Chart on the board for the students' reference, if needed, during the role-play parties.

#### **Sample conversation**

If necessary, prepare students to participate in brief small-talk conversations at a party by modeling an example conversation. Display the conversation on the board and model it with the help of a student volunteer or by playing both parts yourself using different voices, body language, and/or positions for the two characters:

**Frank:** Hello. My name is Frank.

**Paul:** Nice to meet you, Frank. I'm Paul.



**Frank:** Nice to meet you, too. Paul, what do you do?

**Paul:** I work in a restaurant. I'm a server.

**Frank:** Oh, I see. What do you like about your job?

**Paul:** I meet many new people.

**Frank:** What do you dislike about your job, Paul?

**Paul:** I stand up all day, so I get tired. Frank, what is your job?

**Frank:** I'm a firefighter.

**Paul:** That sounds exciting. What do you wear to work?

**Frank:** I wear a yellow uniform and a helmet.

**Paul:** I see. Is your work dangerous?

**Frank:** Yes, but I like to help people.

**Paul:** That's great! Have a good time at the party, Frank.

**Frank:** You, too, Paul.

(Move on to chat with other party guests.)

This activity was written by **Heather Benucci**, an EFL teacher, teacher trainer, and materials development specialist. She has led virtual professional development programs for EFL teachers in over 100 countries and has worked face-to-face with teachers and students in Russia, Korea, England, and the United States.



## Stage Directions

**S**tage directions describe characters' emotions or actions; they help actors interpret scripts. The short script below has several stage directions, but some words have been left out. Fill in the blanks by scrambling the letters in one of the words the character speaks in that line. For example,

JOHN (*looking very* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_): I tried, but I couldn't do it.

Scramble the letters in one of the words John says until you spell a word that makes sense in the stage direction. In this case, you can scramble the word *tried* to form *tired*; the stage direction should read *looking very tired*:

JOHN (*looking very tired*): I tried, but I couldn't do it.

For each missing word below, complete the stage direction by scrambling one word in the character's line.

### THE LOST RING

FRANCINE is sitting at a table, reading. FRANK enters.

FRANK (*loudly, with a big* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_): Look! I found your ring!

FRANCINE (*with a wide* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_): Wonderful! I've walked for miles looking for it.

FRANK: Here you are. (*He gives the ring to FRANCINE.*)

FRANCINE: Thank you! Where was it?

FRANK (*in a* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ *voice than before*): In the forest.

FRANCINE (*putting her hand to her* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_): Why are you whispering?

FRANK (*still speaking softly*): Because we're in the library.

FRANCINE: You're right. We should go celebrate!

FRANK (*looking excited and* \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_): I agree. Let's go!

*They exit.*



**Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE***

**STAGE DIRECTIONS**

- ↔ *looking excited and eager* (αγαλλίασε και ενθουσιάστηκε)
- ↔ *putting her hand to her ear* (ακούγοντας με το χέρι της στο αυτί)
- ↔ *(in a softer voice than before) forest* (με πιο ήπια φωνή από πριν) δάσος
- ↔ *(with a wide smile)* (με ένα πλατύ χαμόγελο)
- ↔ *(loudly) ringing a big bell* (με δυνατή φωνή) χτυπάει ένα μεγάλο καρότσι