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# HORIZONS

*The Journal of David's English Teaching World*

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**Dealing with Job Burnout**  
*by David Vincent*

**Are you an Effective Teacher of Reading?**  
*by Adam Simpson*

**Teaching Collocations with the Word 'Mind'**  
*by Michael Thomas*

**Begging ex-Teacher in Thailand**  
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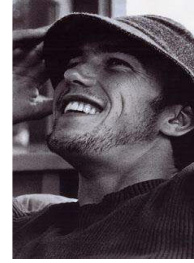
**Jack Snow's Way of Dealing with the Past**  
*by Joseph Bleazard*

**The PITS (Politically Incorrect Tasks)**  
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# Editorial

Dear friends,

Summer is upon us now and many of us are at that stage of the year when we're making plans to move on. With this in mind, one of the major articles in this issue focuses on what to ask at your job interview, an issue focused on in detail at the forums. Other forum issues in this issue are the meaning of the word *gay* and the results of the poll on whether or not your employer provides medical insurance.



Elsewhere, *Martin McMorro* offers us some wonderful, politically incorrect tasks to spice up those speaking lessons. *Voicu Mihnea Simandan* describes an incident of a begging native speaker in Thailand, while *Joseph Bleazard* offers us a fiction based on the notion of teaching the tenses of English. We continue our commitment to professional development with articles on teaching reading and vocabulary, from *Adam Simpson* and *Michael Thomas* respectively. Our look at the people behind the websites also continues, with an interview with *Sue Swift* from ELT Notebook.

**DAVID VINCENT**

Front cover: '*Cairo*' (2007) by James Latham

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## Dealing with Job Burnout

by David Vincent

**If life weren't tough enough anyway, the miserable fact is that job burnout is increasingly common in the contemporary, stress filled workplace. As teachers of English, I feel we're prone to this more than just about any other group of professionals.**

**While some job stress can, naturally, be regarded as a normal occurrence, how can we really know when we've lost the ability to control the root causes of that stress, or when they're leading to a more serious condition, *job burnout*?**

Job burnout, though a serious problem, is a natural response to stress in the workplace, leaving us feeling powerless, frustrated, fatigued, drained and even without hope. Never the less, it's important to realise that, in teaching English as in any profession, job burnout doesn't happen overnight; it's important to recognise the early signs and act before the problem becomes serious. Here are a few questions you really might like to ask yourself:

- ♦ Do you often find yourself dreading going to work in the morning?
- ♦ Do you regularly feel fatigued and lacking in energy at work?
- ♦ Are you easily bored at work?
- ♦ Do work activities you once found enjoyable now feel like drudgery?
- ♦ Do you feel depressed on a Sunday (assuming that your job affords you some form of weekend), thinking

about Monday and the coming week?

- ♦ Have you become more cynical or bitter about your job / boss / place of work?
- ♦ Do you find yourself easily annoyed or irritated by your co-workers?
- ♦ Are non-work relationships (marital, family, friendships) affected by your feelings about work?
- ♦ Do you find yourself envious of individuals who are happy in their work?

Think about this: Do you now care less than you used to about doing a *good job*? If you answered yes to half or more of the above, the chances are you're suffering from some degree of job burnout. Unfortunately, for many who reach the burnout stage, the steps out of it can be really difficult, especially as burned out individuals often feel as though there's no hope.

The fatigue and despair we associate with burnout can make it hard to actively seek solutions. Also, it often leads to feelings of isolation, leaving people feeling alone in their predicament. The difficulties in dealing with full-scale job burnout are why it's important to recognise the early signs and take action, a good starting point being to recognise the factors that could be leading to burnout.

Theories about job burnout say tedious and boring jobs appear to be one source. Another is facing a job that's beyond your ability to do it well. Lack of recognition for the work you do can be another serious source of job stress. As teachers of English, it's easy to see



how these symptoms manifest themselves in our everyday lives.

Although it can be difficult for those faced with burnout, it's not impossible to recover from. If someone is experiencing burnout, the first step is to address the causes of work dissatisfaction, in other words the *what*, *when* and *why* of burnout:

### **What?**

Have you been able to face changes in the organisation, the demands of the job, your boss, or the industry? These changes happen often, did you realise the effect that they had on you?

### **When?**

Was there some pivotal event that changed the way you view your job; a new boss, other teachers, or responsibilities? Again, these things happen regularly. Did they have a major effect on you?

### **Why?**

Have you yourself changed? Are your interests or values pertaining to work now different than they were before? Has the school's mission changed? Are your abilities and skills not being utilized?

Identifying the *what*, *when* and *why* of burnout can help to start you on the road to exploring options to manage the sources of your stress. Sometimes simple things, such as talking to a boss about making changes to your job responsibilities, can make a difference.

Sometimes more serious measures may, however, be necessary, such as changing jobs or even changing your career field, as daunting as that may sound. Most importantly, job burnout is a reaction to work stress. Methods of

handling stress can be identified and encouraged. While career counselors specialise in helping people with such issues, they are extremely hard to find when you're in a foreign country, if they exist at all. Job burnout is therefore a common problem among TEFL teachers, but one from which we can recover and, in the end, learn more about our needs in relation to work.

There are practical methods we can employ to combat the condition, regardless of our situation. Here are some things we can do:

### ***Take care of our bodies***

Eating right, sleeping well, doing exercise and seeing a doctor if we feel burned out. If we can take care of our physical health, it will reduce our burnout.

### ***Do our favorite things***

Make a schedule for spoiling ourselves over the course of a day, week or month. Reading favourite books or doing our hobbies is the same as recharging the batteries after going through a difficult period.

### ***Set yourself realistic targets***

Making targets for our lives will give us a genuine sense of purpose. We should make personal targets over the short and long term and set up a plan to achieve the targets. Learning and reaching new targets will ease our burnout.

### ***Talk with friends and colleagues***

Communicate with others who will listen and understand us, but not judge. Talking with others like that will ease our emotions and we are practicing *healthy* communication. We



must be sure to let our emotions out in healthy and productive ways.

***Understand our strengths and weaknesses***

Knowing our strengths and weaknesses can help us to learn better ways to deal with day-to-day stress. We can avoid stress once we recognize the cause.

***Enhance our relationships***

Getting closer to our partners, children, friends and other people we can count on will really help restore our energy. It can ease our burnout, as we will not feel underappreciated.

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## Are you an effective teacher of reading?

by Adam Simpson

**Reading occurs in our lives on a constant basis. Nevertheless, defining reading is not easy. Different people use the term reading for different purposes, which can cause much confusion.**

**For the context of the language classroom this article will concern itself with the notion of reading as the extraction of *meaning* from a written text<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the text is viewed as a vehicle of communication from the writer to the reader; Aebersold and Field (1997) acknowledge this by stating that it is the *interaction* between the text and reader that constitutes actual reading<sup>2</sup>.**

**However, simply stating that this is what constitutes reading is to risk forgetting that, in the reading class, the most important thing is that both the teacher and the student should understand the reading process.**

In my experience, some of the things that happen in classrooms seem to interfere with reading rather than promote it. Among the biggest is the failure to apply skills to second language reading in the way that they are applied to reading in L1<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, some learners may read extensively in their L1<sup>4</sup> while others, perhaps due to cultural influences or

personal learning styles<sup>5</sup>, dislike reading in a foreign language. This will consequently affect the enthusiasm with which they approach a text. Although at a variety of times all literate people read, there is a constant danger in the language classroom to forget that reading is a process with a distinct purpose, and reading different things requires different approaches and processes. Indeed, as Nuttall (1998) notes;

*'If the only foreign language items... read recently were directly concerned with teaching, it may be that you, and your students too, do not really need to read that language except for classroom purposes.'*<sup>6</sup>

If this is the case, even the avid reader's motivation to read will be low, as the purpose for reading is contrived, merely for the language classroom. I have noted in my past attempts to teach reading that motivation can sink when the learner is presented with no genuine reason to complete the activity; this is a particular problem when working with texts in course books, which may have been produced so as to offend no one, but also end up of interest to no one too.

With these issues in mind, this paper will briefly define the concept of reading in terms of language learning, and will look at the problems learners have when reading, along with

<sup>1</sup> As noted by Nuttall, (1998), p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Aebersold and Field, (1997), p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Thus leading to the idea that the meaning of the text will simply 'flow' into the learner, as illustrated in Fig.2, taken from Nuttall, (1998).

<sup>4</sup> L1 refers to the learner's native tongue.

<sup>5</sup> With regard to learning styles, auditory learners, i.e. those learners who learn best by listening, may have a particular dislike for reading.

<sup>6</sup> Nuttall, (1998), p.3.

practical solutions that I have used in the classroom.

### **The Reading Process**

This process is not as simple as it may first appear; there is no guarantee that the meaning which a writer intends to *encode* in a text will be the same as the message the reader *decodes* from it. Reading is not a *passive* process where the meaning passes directly from writer to reader via the medium of the text, but rather an *interactive* process during which the reader extracts meaning from signs on a page<sup>7</sup>, and interprets those signs in light of what they know of the world. It is therefore subject to both *cultural* and *experiential* differences, between reader and writer. I will discuss this in greater detail later when we consider the problems facing the learner during a reading lesson.

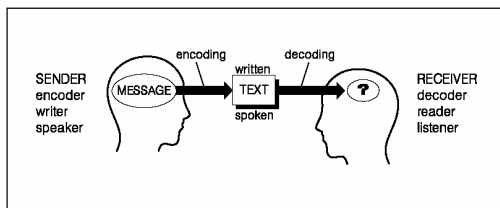


Figure 1: The Interactive Process of Reading

### **Different Ways for Different Purposes**

Our reasons for reading the football results, for instance, are very different from our reasons for reading a novel. Consequently, the way that a particular text is tackled is strongly influenced by ones purpose for reading. Quickly scanning a page to find someone's telephone number is very different from perusing a legal document. There are big differences in the speed used. Also, people generally read silently,

while in some cases, such as in a traditional classroom setting, learners may read aloud<sup>8</sup>.

Wallace (1992) identifies three personal reasons for reading: reading for *survival*, reading for *learning* and reading for *pleasure*<sup>9</sup>. Reading for survival would include such actions as reading the cooking instructions on a packet of food. Reading for learning obviously involves reading such things as textbooks, but would also include anything that extends our knowledge of the world. Reading for pleasure involves any reading that is not done with a specific goal in mind, that is to say that reading is done for its own sake. All of these can be classified as authentic reasons, which require different strategies.

### **Reading for Meaning**

Whatever the reasons for reading<sup>10</sup>, it is unlikely that pronunciation or the grammatical structures used were of interest. In fact, Nuttall (1998) argues;

*'If we are setting out to teach the language then we are not giving a reading lesson.'*<sup>11</sup>

People read because they want to get something from the writing. Nuttall defines this as the *message*: it might have been facts, but could just as well have been enjoyment, ideas, or feelings<sup>12</sup>. Whatever it was, the reader probably wanted to get the message that the writer intended. In the case of second language reading, the purpose hasn't always been to extract meaning.

### **Reading in a Second Language**

<sup>8</sup> The reasons that lead us to articulate what is read illustrate the unnatural nature of classroom reading, in that reading aloud is uncommon outside the classroom.

<sup>9</sup> Wallace, (1992), p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Excluding any reading for language learning.

<sup>11</sup> Nuttall, (1998), p.31.

<sup>12</sup> From a family letter, for instance.

<sup>7</sup> See fig.1. Taken from Nuttall, (1998).





In some cases the advantages of knowing a foreign language are clear to learners: better jobs, access to literature, etc. Reading is usually recognized as a necessary part of these activities. However, as noted in the introduction, reading in the language classroom can lack the feeling of authenticity<sup>13</sup>, as the texts have been produced for the purpose of language learning, and not for a particular reader to extract meaning in the way they would normally do.

This is a major problem for many language teachers: the motivation of *needing to read* is powerful. Being able to motivate students by making their foreign language reading interesting is a key issue. As Nuttall notes:

*'The language is alive – its users have the same variety of purposes for reading as anybody has when reading their mother tongue – and this fact can be used by teachers to increase motivation.'*<sup>14</sup>

By treating reading as a purposeful activity, it becomes more focused and classes livelier.

### **Reading as a Skill**

Nuttall suggests that the learner's primary reason for learning a foreign language is often to achieve non-linguistic goals, such as functioning at work or surviving in a foreign country. With this in mind it becomes valid to teach reading as a skill in itself rather than a means to promote language acquisition. Aebersold and Field (1997) suggest we can do this in a variety of ways:

*'Some actions aid readers' comprehension of the written text. Some actions monitor readers' comprehension and some actions help readers evaluate the information they get from the written text and adjust their reading strategies if needed.'*<sup>15</sup>

Inferring the meaning of unknown words is a valuable strategy and one that can be applied to all texts irrespective of genre. Moreover, excessive use of the dictionary slows reading speed, interrupts the reading process and ultimately renders reading more difficult<sup>16</sup>. Van Duzer (1999) states that the ultimate goal of teaching reading should be:

*'To enable learners to read for a sustained, uninterrupted period silently... and without help, unfamiliar and authentic texts, at appropriate speed, and with adequate understanding.'*<sup>17</sup>

Texts thus need to be chosen that will promote reading as a result of their *'potential in developing reading strategies.'*<sup>18</sup> This suggests that if the reading lesson is to equip students with the necessary strategies to tackle authentic texts outside the classroom it follows that what happens within the classroom should not only relate to the text being studied.

### **Use of Authentic Texts**

There is a strong argument for the use of authentic texts in the classroom. Simplified texts often lack many of the discourse features of authentic ones and therefore will not enable learners

<sup>13</sup> By authentic I mean reasons that are concerned not with language learning but with the uses of reading in learner's daily lives outside the classroom.

<sup>14</sup> Nuttall, (1998), p.3.

<sup>15</sup> Aebersold and Field, (1997), p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Inference and dictionary use are explored in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

<sup>17</sup> Van Duzer, (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Wallace, (1992), p.74.



to tackle texts they meet outside the classroom. An ability to infer meaning is a vital strategy<sup>19</sup> and if everything in the text is too explicit, one which students will lack the opportunity to develop. Nuttall suggests texts should:

*'Preserve whatever in the original will appeal to the intelligence of your students, while removing those elements (new words, complex sentences) which intelligence alone cannot deal with.'*<sup>20</sup>

So, while Nuttall suggests adaptation is acceptable, over simplification is to be avoided since it prevents learners engaging with the text in a meaningful way<sup>21</sup>. Authentic texts carry the features of texts that students will encounter outside the class, so the argument for using them as opposed to texts specifically designed for teaching English is strong. Anderson (1999) raises an interesting point, by suggesting that authenticity of task is more important than authenticity of text<sup>22</sup>.

### **Problems and Solutions**

Throughout this article I have hinted at the many problems that learners have when reading in a second language. These are now examined in more detail, and some solutions suggested.

### **Background Knowledge**

As mentioned, there are cultural and experiential differences which may hinder an individual's understanding of a text. This usually goes beyond the mere understanding of the lexis. The reader may suffer from the following problems:

- ✓ *The writer and reader don't share the same code OR the code is only partly shared.*
- ✓ *The reader has no background knowledge.*
- ✓ *The ideas are too complex.*

Overcoming these problems requires the writer and reader having something in common. A familiar problem in second language reading is that of only partially shared code.

It can be suggested that the construction of meaning is a combination of both bottom-up processing<sup>23</sup>, particularly when a learner has little context within which to place the reading, as well as top down<sup>24</sup>. Grellet (1981) argues reading should start with a global understanding and move towards detailed understanding rather than the other way round<sup>25</sup>. Grellet suggests that if reading is to be efficient, the structure of longer units such as paragraphs or the whole text must be understood. Studying a text as a series of independent units will encourage learners to become dependent on understanding every single sentence in a text, and they will be reluctant to infer the meaning of sentences or paragraphs from what comes before or after. Where learners lack cultural knowledge, they need to be provided with enough information, and encouraged to draw on their own experiences by making comparisons and contrasts, to help them create a context that will enable understanding.

To overcome the bottom-up, top-down dichotomy and integrate the two

<sup>19</sup> As noted previously.

<sup>20</sup> Nuttall, (1982), p.82.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, (1999), p.105.

<sup>23</sup> Understanding of words and phrases and sentences in the text.

<sup>24</sup> Which involves our expectations and our previous knowledge. As noted by Ur, (1996).

<sup>25</sup> Grellet, (1981), p.65.

approaches to reading we can use both extensive *and* intensive reading exercises<sup>26</sup>. I personally begin with a more global approach, even for intensive reading exercises, as I consider it important to have a general idea of what a text is about before trying to understand detail. Integration of these approaches can be accomplished by beginning a reading activity with a lead-in exercise that introduces the topic and stimulates interest in the topic, thereby providing motivation for learners to read the text.

As a pre-reading activity develop interest and provide a context in which the learners can try to situate the text, they can then make predictions about what they think the text is about, and / or what other lexical items might be associated with the topic. This could involve:

- ✓ *Looking at any pictures that accompany the text, and trying to analyse what they represent.*
- ✓ *Looking at titles and sub-headings to try and guess the content.*

It will also help learners to understand that reading involves more than simply processing words; it involves making predictions and guessing what's coming next.

After learners have a general understanding of the text, then they can complete tasks that focus on specific details:

- ✓ *Making lists of ideas / events presented in the test.*
- ✓ *Matching headings to sections of text.*
- ✓ *Finding places within a text to reinsert information that has been taken out.*

<sup>26</sup> As noted by Scrivener, (1994) Harmer, (2001) Ur, (1996) Nunan, (1988) and Grellet, (1981).

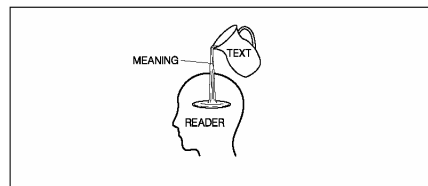
Tasks can also be given that require a more comprehensive understanding of the text:

- ✓ *Putting a list of events into chronological order.*
- ✓ *Acting out the dialogue / story.*
- ✓ *Discussing various interpretations of / reactions to the text.*
- ✓ *Creating the end of the story.*

Furthermore, after reading for meaning, vocabulary or grammar focused exercises and tasks such as gap fills, meaning and lexis matching, or error correction can be used to determine learners' understanding of particular language items.

### Reading Skills

Sometimes learners feel that the text should simply pour ideas into their heads, rather than them employing skills<sup>27</sup>. Consequently, learners need to be taught to skim, scan, preview, as well as read intensively. These are strategies they probably use in their first-language, and must learn to



*Figure 2: One View of Reading in a language classroom*

transfer them to their second language<sup>28</sup>. Providing activities and tasks that encourage a variety of reading types will also improve learners' reading efficiency.

<sup>27</sup> As shown in figure 2, taken from Nuttall, (1998).

<sup>28</sup> As noted by Nunan, (1994) and Ur, (1996).



Employing both extensive and intensive reading activities will also help learners understand and make use of a variety of reading strategies<sup>29</sup>. We can set skimming tasks for learners to quickly read and get a general understanding of a text, encouraging them not to worry about the meaning of individual words. A time limit will force learners to keep their dictionaries closed<sup>30</sup>. To further encourage a range of techniques, we can set tasks where learners have to scan a text looking for specific information.

### **Dictionary Dependence**

Learners expect to understand every word. This may help improve their vocabulary and understanding of grammar, but does not make them better readers<sup>31</sup>. It is important to help learners understand that it is not necessary to understand every word, or sentence.

Gaining a general understanding by reading quickly and not worrying about individual words helps wean learners off their dictionaries, and encourages the use of a variety of reading strategies<sup>32</sup>. Grellet (1981) suggests that learners must be trained to infer the meaning of unknown words. This can be done by:

- ✓ *Beginning with words that they already know but are incomplete within the text. Learners then guess the word based on the context.*
- ✓ *Learners can be encouraged to discover strategies for inferencing unknown words through the context and use of*

*the word. They can practice guessing the meaning through word formation.*

- ✓ *Being aware of how words are formed and of the value of prefixes and suffixes will help learners discover the meaning of many unknown words.*

### **Motivation**

Lack of motivation to read is a tricky problem because some learners simply don't like reading<sup>33</sup>. Ways must be found to convince them that reading can be enjoyable and beneficial, in terms of language learning development.

To help motivate learners it is important that reading texts are accessible and the tasks are authentic. Different texts lend themselves to different reading skills, and will be read for different purposes<sup>34</sup>. This should be reflected in reading lessons, especially when we are trying to generate interest and motivate learners to read. If we require learners to read every detail in, for example, a page of job advertisements rather than skimming for a required piece of information, they will quickly become bored and frustrated with reading.

### **Closing Thoughts**

We must take care to include tasks that will encourage learners to become aware the things we do when we read. As mentioned, reading is not a passive skill, rather an active one that involves a wider variety of cognitive activities. Successful reading results from the understanding a reader brings to the text, i.e. contextual knowledge,

<sup>29</sup> As noted by Scrivener,(1994) and Harmer,(2001)

<sup>30</sup> And therefore help them to understand that they don't need to know every word to understand the general idea and meaning of a text.

<sup>31</sup> As noted by Nunan,(1994).

<sup>32</sup> As noted by Ur,(1996) and Grellet,(1981).

<sup>33</sup> Either in their first or second language. As noted by Nunan, (1988). As mentioned in the introduction, this could be influenced by individual learning styles.

<sup>34</sup> As noted by Ur, (1994) and Grellet, (1981).



knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Reading also requires constant guessing and checking. When reading we anticipate and predict what will come next, based on what we have read and our previous experiences with similar texts. We confirm our predictions as we read, and adjust our next predictions accordingly. This aspect of reading highlights the problems of reading in the classroom, where learners are often required to read texts with which they have no previous knowledge.

When we read in our native language we employ many decoding strategies, which we learn as children and are second nature to us. As adults, we employ them subconsciously; so many learners are unaware of using them. By developing meta-cognitive strategies we can make learners aware of their own reading strategies. This is best accomplished through the process of shared reading, during which learners discuss and rationalise their thought processes, making *explicit* something they do *implicitly*. In order to become effective independent readers, the primary consideration of a reading lesson should be to help learners understand the reading process better.

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# ... THE FORUMS ...

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## Secrets of those that do the TEFL Hiring: What you Need to Ask at your TEFL Interview

General Discussion

**In March, Mishmumkin raised an issue of great significance to those of us who are looking for that dream TEFL job or are considering starting out in the profession: 'If I've done my research correctly I should know a great deal about my potential employer before the interview. I'm curious what those who do the hiring wish their candidates asked about.'**

**So, what are recruiters expecting from their prospective employees at the interview? The forum members shared their wealth of experience in offering the following words of great wisdom. Here's what those in the position to hire feel you should be asking your future employer at that interview:**

### Ask what you NEED to know

First and foremost, there is a consensus that you really need to ask what's important to you as the employee: don't assume that the person interviewing you knows what your priorities are. **MELEE** notes that, *'mostly I'm just listening to see what they ask me. That will tell me what's important to them (the students, the curriculum, resources, housing, benefits, vacation time, etc.). I do the interviews individually, but then report back to a panel - that conversation always includes letting the others know what questions were asked by the candidate.'* When

applying for a job it's easy to forget that, while it's a one of event for you as the potential employee, the person doing the hiring is having the same interaction many, many times and, as noted earlier, is probably under time constraints. Therefore they are likely to try to get what they need from the encounter, leaving you to ask the questions you personally need answering. **Justin Trullinger** exemplifies the kind of things that he, from experience, feels teachers should ask at the interview:

*'I do the hiring at the organisation where I work. It's not that I have a list of questions I want you to ask, because I don't know what's important to you but I feel very strongly that you SHOULD ask about whatever is. Some of the worst problems I've had with teachers have had to do with things that were important to them that they didn't find out about beforehand, or didn't ask for more details.'*

Some examples:

### 1 Clothing:

Teachers placed in elementary schools through us wear uniforms. They are told about this before hiring, and asked if they are okay with it. Depending on the school, these uniforms vary - some are very smart suit looking things, but some, especially at lower income schools, are sweatsuits with school logos. One teacher, very appearance conscious, was so horrified by wearing



a sweatsuit that she was unable to continue, and we had to negotiate special permission for her to wear her own clothes. This made all the parents think she was the principal. It was a mess. Personally, I don't care what I wear, and would love to have a uniform, any uniform that meant I wouldn't have to shop for clothes, or try to figure out what color tie goes with things...but to her, it was an issue. She should have asked.

## 2 Costs of living:

Some things are very cheap in Ecuador. Some are more expensive. Computers are first world prices or higher. Having read online that the cost of living in Ecuador is low (in terms of rent and food, it is) one teacher decided rather than bringing a computer, to buy one here. But here, lap tops are high end luxury without much selection. He should have asked.

## 3 Housing:

We don't provide housing - but many of our teachers share apartments with each other - which is clearly stated in our pre-interview literature. This is because Ecuadorian apartments are mostly large family or multifamily units, and it would be hard to afford one on your own. A teacher who doesn't like to share simply assumed that he could find his own, and anticipated finding an apartment for the same cost as a room in a shared unit. Not a chance. Then he complains that it's hard to make ends meet...should have asked.

## 4 Teaching conditions:

Our teachers are expected to use text books, but not to spend the whole course using only textbooks. They also have to be creative and come up with their own supplementary activities and

materials. Payment for this is included in their hourly rate - they are not paid for extra hours for doing it. This is standard enough that I didn't make an issue of it, though again, it says in the package that "teaching hours are paid for at \$X per hour, and that this rate includes preparation..." Again, if this is a problem, ask, let's talk beforehand. Likewise, if you have any financial obligations outside of the country, like student loan payments, it would be good to ask about how feasible that is...

To that list I'd certainly want to add medical insurance and, if you're thinking about staying in a country for an extended period of time, you might also want to look into their policies regarding work permits and social security contributions. Those of you who're new to teaching may find it hard to believe but some of us end up staying for good. It would be a shame to find out several years down the line that you've been living illegally and that your presence in a country is no longer welcome, or that what could have become a reasonable state pension to supplement your retirement doesn't exist as your employers never registered you. Ask!

## Post-interview questions

Of course, sometimes as the interviewee, you're going to feel overwhelmed by the situation. A natural consequence of this is forgetting to ask the questions that you really need answering, as **Emma** notes, *'I've found in interviews that the interviewer has told me so much information about the school and teaching methods that I really can't think of anything when asked if I have questions. To ask about obvious stuff like salary when I haven't been offered a job seems presumptuous.'* This issue of asking about salary is something that I'll return to later. **Emma** also



asked the following question on the forum:

*'How do you feel about teachers coming back and asking questions before accepting the post?'*

**MELEE** replied thus, reiterating the need to be time conscious, *'I think it's great. I'd rather teachers ask only 2 or 3 of the most important questions in the interview, but that's because we interview over the phone and I'm under pressure to try to keep the calls around 30 minutes. I welcome additional questions by email, no matter how many. The sooner the better because really I'm using those questions to decide whether or not I'm going to make you an offer.'* Something I've always done at the end of an interview is ask the interviewer if I can make additional contact after our meeting, primarily because I experience the kind of information overload that **Emma** mentions. As **MELEE** quite clearly states, this is beneficial to both parties.

#### Time (not) to talk money

Now onto the issue that's almost always at the bottom line, salary. **Gordon** shares his thoughts on the matter:

*'Prospective applicants should not ask about salary until they are offered the job. On the other hand, applicants should have a pretty good idea of the salary at this point anyways. I won't apply for a job unless I have a decent idea of the salary range, in many cases it would be a waste of everyone's time. I hate it when jobs don't give the salary in the ad or at least the salary range.'* It's not impossible these days to get a fairly good idea of what you can expect to earn in a particular country or even at a certain school. Asking questions at the ELT World Forums is

one good way to learn such information. **Sherri** adds, *'I don't see why the salary should be such a big secret. I always tell the applicants what they can expect to make. I usually tell them over the phone before we schedule the interview. There is a pay scale so it is easy to figure out. All teachers have a copy of the pay scale once hired. If it looks like the interview is going well, I tell them how often they will be paid and when they can expect their first pay check. This is especially important for people who are relocating for a job.'* I also chipped in with a recommendation which has always seen me right in the past:

*'I think it's appropriate for the interviewee to raise the issue, such as, 'I'm sure once you've made your decision about hiring me, we can talk in more detail about the salary and benefits package you offer.' This lets the interviewer know that while this isn't your only motivation for wanting the job, it is something that they expect to be informed about in detail at some point.'*

**Gordon** summarises the issue perfectly when he states, *'I think one doesn't want to appear as though money is the most important factor in the job decision, whereas we all know that it is.'* I would make it clear that you will want to have a clear idea about the kind of money you'll be earning without making that the sole purpose for you having turned up for the interview.

#### How can you prepare for the interview?

What can you do before the interview? **Gordon** again offers advice:

*'Before an interview, I write a list of things (housing, resources, etc) that I want answered before*





*deciding to take a job. Then, during the interview I take copious notes, and if the interview hasn't answered my questions, I ask them at the question time. Although, just thinking about it now, I haven't had a face to face interview for years now, so its easy to have my little list and notebook. Not sure how that would go down in a face to face interview.'*

While **Gordon** may not have tried this in a face to face interview, this is a tactic that I myself have used and find that it has been received well. If you've taken the time to sit down and make a note of what you need to know from this potential employer, it gives the impression that you're serious about wanting the job.

Another thing that makes a good impression is showing that you've given some thought about how you'll fit in to the school. **Sherri** exemplifies, *'I must admit, I like it when people ask about the students. I like it when they ask about the work atmosphere, but how the teachers work together, if they share and support each other. I like it if they show an interest in our program and show that they at least looked at our website.'* For the interview I had for my present job, I printed off the school's entire website, annotated the points that interested me and highlighted other information I wanted to ask about. While there was no way for me to get through more than one or two points that I'd noted, it gave the impression that I'd really thought about why I wanted to work here, and was told as much later.

### Don't waste their time

Let's now briefly assume you've been offered a job. Having noted earlier that recruiters appreciate you asking questions that will help you decide if

you're going to take the position, think about whether or not you're realistically thinking of taking the position before making secondary contact. **MELEE** explains: *'If I make the offer, then you hit me with questions that lead me to believe that this is not the best position for you, then you've wasted my time because I need to give you adequate time before I offer it to someone else rather than you.'* Think, at some point it could be you who misses out on an interview because someone was wasting the recruiter's time mulling over an offer they didn't intend to take.

One thing you also really need to do is prioritise what you need to ask. The interviewer will want to make a decision about you just as much as you want to decide if you want the job. One sure way to put off the person deciding whether or not to hire you will be asking questions to which you could easily find the answers elsewhere. Think about this: what would you rather know about, the number of hours you could expect to work in an average week or the colour of the tiles in the bathroom of the apartment you'll be sharing? Prioritise what you need to learn about the school. **Yaramaz** explains this issue, referring to a recent incident in her efforts to recruit teachers:

*'We just recently recruiting for next term and have had an interesting time poring over applications. One woman included a jpeg list of over 100 questions for us to answer-- not even in word or PDF format! How can we even begin to answer 147 questions on a jpeg??? And most were really pointless questions that could be googled or asked in the interview, like "Do you have a photocopier?" and 'what is the climate of your city?' Aaaaagh!'*



Aaaaaagh indeed. Imagine how you would feel if you received such a list of questions at a time when you've got to interview numerous people. How much priority would you give to someone who asked questions to which they could so easily find the answers themselves?

I'll conclude by returning to the advice of **Justin Trullinger**: *'It isn't a question of what you should ask - but ask everything that YOU need to know. I may not know what's important to you, but it's important that you ask about what you need to know. Do not assume! Whatever you need to know in order to make an adequate decision, you'll need to ask.'*

The poll on initial training courses can be found in the ELT world **general discussion** forum: <http://eltworld.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1062>

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## The Meaning of Gay

General discussion

**For those of you who don't know Jeremy Clarkson, he is a popular presenter on the BBC, usually on programs relating to cars, Top Gear being the most famous. He got himself in a spot of bother a while back for referring to a car as being gay.**

**Whether or not the car in question should have been criticised by Clarkson is debatable (given that this was on a show that reviewed new cars, he probably had the right to comment on it). However, the reason why he was censured, for the use of the g-word, was quite wrong. Here's why.**

Naturally, those in power at the beeb had to be seen to act against homophobic attitudes, and quite rightly so. What they failed to acknowledge, however, is the fundamental shift in the lexical range of this word. Just as the meaning of gay shifted dramatically from being a reference to all things carefree and happy-go-lucky in the 40s and 50s to being synonymous with homosexuality and same-sex love, it has again changed in meaning to the point where it is now an adjective often as not used to describe lameness and lack of cool.

When Clarkson says that such a car isn't to his liking because 'it's just gay', it's my feeling that he isn't suggesting that the car isn't suitable for him as its target market is the homosexual

community of which he isn't a part, rather that it's merely lacking in that certain cool factor.

This is an important point for us language teachers as shifts in word meaning / lexical coverage are not handled very well by our industry / profession. Not that subjects such as homosexuality are dealt with in course books (much too controversial), nor that the shift in meaning has meant that gay no longer has any, er, gay connotations, it's that Clarkson's show is available to a worldwide audience and the BBC's assertion on this matter was just wrong. This idea of flexibility and changeable meaning has to gain more prominence or we'll find ourselves having to justify definitions that are outdated and just plain incorrect.

Nothing new there, I hear those of you who have just spent the last week explaining why 'whom' is still a vitally important part of English say. Maybe, but we shouldn't be waiting for published materials to catch up with real language, as I feel is too often the case. In Turkey, I find myself faced with societal attitudes towards the issue of homosexuality which differ to my own. Whilst I may feel that attitudes towards this issue are archaic, I respect the fact that Turkish society can do without an outsider imposing his opinions on what he feels is right and wrong. When it comes to archaic language, however, what I can and must do is make sure that the language my students learn is not outdated.

The discussion on this issue can be found in the ELT world **general discussion** forum: <http://eltworld.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1070>



## *Begging ex-teacher in Thailand*

by Voicu Mihnea Simandan

<http://ladpraobilingualschool.googlepages.com/>

**Initially, this article was posted on my teaching blog, but it has been revised for publication in *Horizons*:**

In July 2007, while shopping with my Thai wife in the Chatuchak Weekend Market from Bangkok, I saw, among many Thai beggars, a foreigner begging for money to buy a plane ticket to return home (to a Western European country)! On a yellow future board, he informed the passers-by that he has got no money to go home and that he accepts anything anyone could offer.

Being the first foreigner in Thailand that I have seen begging, I approached him. I was curious to listen to his story. How on Earth was it possible for a white man to become a beggar in Southeast Asia?

It is common knowledge that foreigners working in Thailand receive very good salaries. An English teacher, with a BA and a teaching certificate, can earn between 30,000 and 60,000 *baht* / month (1 USD = 30 *baht*), depending on the location and the type of school. Schools in Bangkok pay more, while schools in the provinces, where the life is not that expensive, sometimes pay below 30,000 *baht*. The best paying schools are the international schools, where a qualified teacher (with a PGCE) can make even more than 100,000 *baht*/month. In comparison, Thai teachers have to make do with salaries between 4,000 and 10,000 *baht* / month!

The foreign beggar told me that he once worked as a teacher, but as he had got no degree or teaching certificate he was sacked when the Thai government started hunting for teachers with fake degrees or schools that employ unqualified teachers. He worked part time for a while, but sometimes he could make only about 9,000 *baht* a month, which was definitely not enough for rent, food and transportation! He was in a very tough situation, with no job at all, and had already overstayed a few days in Thailand. Obviously, he had no money to buy a return ticket home. What other choice did he have, except begging?

I gave him my general manager's phone number, but as he had no mobile phone, he wrote the number on a piece of paper and gave me his e-mail address. I told him to call my boss and ask her if there were any fill-in lessons she could give him, but I was aware of the fact that, with no degrees, he had no chances at all of getting a full-time job! I also gave him some money and left. There was nothing more I could have done for him!

On the way home, I called my boss and told her about the begging ex-teacher and she said she would wait for his phone call. My wife was distressed by the beggar's story, and could not understand why his embassy didn't help him.

The beggar never called my boss and he didn't reply my e-mail. I wonder



why? I just hope that he returned back home safely.

The blog article triggered some comments, most of which were not as sympathetic with the foreign beggar as I was. The first reader that left a comment believed that *“he [the beggar] just tried to cheat you and he succeeded,”* but I replied that I didn’t think it was the case as *“the loss of face involved must have worth more than the few hundred baht he made that day!”*

The next comment tried to convince me that I might be wrong, the author mentioning *“a good story in a newspaper a while back and it was about a foreigner doing just this. He was also begging and when the newspaper spoke to him he informed them he could make more than his monthly income he was getting when teaching and he only had to do it a few hours a day... I have seen this story happen in Pattaya especially.”*

Another fellow blogger from Thailand wrote that *“there have been stories about a ‘farang’ [foreigner] begging on ThaiVisa.com’s forum. Whilst I admire your generosity (I would probably have done the same) he might not be exactly what you think. If I were in that situation and offered a lifeline (your offer of possible work) I would have made every effort to follow up. I think the fact he hasn’t says a lot.”*

To the final comment, *“that beggar is fake. He can go to his country’s embassy to ask for help.”* My reply was *“I’m not sure about that, Anino. Not all embassies have this policy!”*

Whether or not the begging ex-teacher was really broke and out of work, I will probably never know, but at least I can be proud that I helped a fellow teacher in need.

What would you have done in my situation? Do you think the beggar was really in dire straits? You can leave your comments here:

<http://www.teacherinthailand.com/2007/07/begging-ex-teacher.html>

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## ELT World News

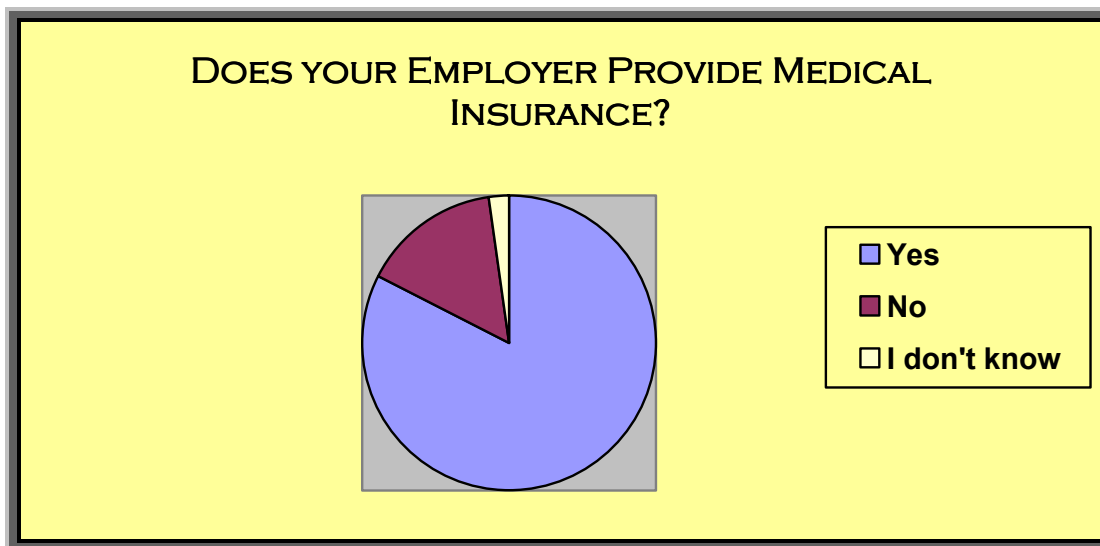
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## Does your employer provide medical insurance?

Blog Poll



*Poll ran throughout March and April and continues in the General Discussion Forum*

The poll on initial training courses can be found in the ELT world **general discussion** forum: <http://eltworld.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=989>

***'How well will you be provided for should you need urgent medical treatment?' I asked on the ELT World forums. Here are the responses of forum members from around the world:***

Many of you seemed to have a pretty good idea of what would happen should you find yourself in trouble. 'Yes', exclaimed **EFL Geek** emphatically finding himself among the vast majority (71 votes – **83%**) of you who are covered in some way should you need medical treatment. Only **15%** (13 votes) of you stated that you weren't covered. All I can say about the **2%** (2 votes) who didn't know if they were covered is that it must be nice to live in blissful ignorance! Several forum members explained the state health system

where they are. **Emma** notes the situation in Greece:

*'In Greece, although your employer has to pay your contributions over to the National Health Service, I'm not sure how good it is and most people have a top-up insurance, even though it is in the EU.'*

**MELEE**, in Mixteca, describes how things are in Mexico:

*'Mexico has national health, not the greatest, but if I had 3rd degree burns over 70% of my body, they'd treat me. Whether or not I'm close enough to a hospital that could handle that terrible of an accident is another story.'*



**Lozwich** explains the situation when covered by private insurance in Bogota, Colombia, in comparison to Spain:

*'I've been lucky (?) enough to have had two surgeries here in Boggy, both completely paid for by my insurance. I think they even paid for the rental of my crutches, and they definitely paid for some slightly radical treatment I had. I gave myself a second degree burn when I lived in Spain, and the "treatment" I received at the local hospital was awful. I got better treatment and follow up physio advice (I damaged tendons in my hand through the burn) from a couple of pals who work for the NHS in London. I think burns are not very well understood by many medical professionals, and think there's plenty of room for improvement on that front all over the world.'*

**Denise** further discusses private health insurance, this time in relation to what one might find in the Gulf:

*'I've only had minor issues and routine checks, but they've been nearly fully covered. I just pay 2 rials, which is about \$5, and get way more drugs than I need for free. Typically, the doc says, "I'm giving you this pill to take three times a day, and this pill to take once a day, and this pill to take only if you're feeling really, really bad, and this other pill that you shouldn't take at all." Once you get into the system for the private hospital in Muscat, you get good care nearly fully covered. You just need a referral to get in for that first visit.'*

The graphic, while reassuring, doesn't of course tell the whole story. **Dmb**

notes, for example, that while his insurance *'also pays %80 of medicine. If I die however, I am only worth 15 grand (\$).'* Further research into whether or not we consider our coverage *adequate* may well feature in a later edition of the journal. **Yaramaz**, another resident of Ataturkburg, Turkey, describes her situation: we don't always appreciate medical coverage until we need it:

*'Yes - but only since last September in my current job. Last spring, several teachers (including myself) were involved in a car accident on the way back from a company class. The owner of our school arranged ambulances to a private hospital and paid out of pocket for all tests and treatments and hospital stays and follow ups (one teacher had a double fractured pelvis). As a result of this accident, they added full private insurance to our new contracts - I haven't used mine yet, but am glad to have it. Public hospitals here are not very reassuring.'*

A good point: if you're going to have to rely on what you can get from the state when faced with a medical emergency, be sure to find out what exactly that is likely to mean. Also, find out if your employer is going to support you or cut corners if they possibly can. **Glenski** exemplifies with a case from Japan:

*'Health insurance co-payments are required by law in Japan. Just be careful about how your employer operates. If he counts only the hours you are in the classroom and it's less than 29 per week, he can legally call you part-time when he reports you to the tax authorities and therefore avoid making the co-payments.'*

Let's round off with some very sound advice from **Fat Chris** in Japan,





advice that will make more sense to you once you get into your thirties:

*'If a job wouldn't offer me health insurance, then I wouldn't be likely to take that job. That said, if I am choosing between two jobs with Job A offering more money and a "lesser" health insurance policy and Job B offering less money and a more comprehensive health*

*insurance policy, I may be more likely to take Job B. Having an adequate health insurance policy can't be emphasized enough. I am currently covered with life insurance thrown in as well.'*

So, if you're accepting a job as a teacher, whether for the first time or not, think about how well you're covered in a medical emergency.

## Writing for Horizons

We are always looking for new writers who are eager to contribute to the journal. For more details, email us:

**horizons@eltworld.net**

Alternatively, download the guide to submissions at the website:

**www.journal.eltworld.net**

## Jack Snow's way of dealing with the past

by Joseph Bleazard

**In this article, Joseph Bleazard offers us a piece of grammatical analysis couched in a fiction about the experience of being a foreigner teaching English, albeit in the 15th century.**

In the early voyages of discovery crews would feature a degenerado. The degenerado would be put ashore to greet potentially hostile tribes in unexplored countries. The degenerado was expendable. A degenerado would typically be a convicted criminal or converted Jew.

Sir Michael Hobbs' journey to China on the "The Gracious" in 1610 featured a degenerado by the name of Jack Snow. Jack Snow had been an able law student at St John's College, and an able contemporary of John Donne, although he had always been a better lawyer than satirist. Jack had roystered with the young Lord Rochester, oblivious to the collapse of his family's estates in Northamptonshire. Languishing in debtor's gaol, he had welcomed the call to join the expedition. Looking back in shame at his family's now partitioned holdings he also secretly welcomed the name as



an expression of his own feelings about himself, the degenerado.

Expecting death at the hands of Portuguese traders, Jack Snow was surprised upon his arrival in Canton in 1611. As his ship lay at berth behind him and he slowly propelled his rowing boat towards land he could almost swear his ship was leaving and he was getting no closer to the alien shore. Landing, he was met in fluent Genoese by a Tunisian merchant and his entourage of slaves. Jack held out his hand and pointed to samples of six types of precious spice, now so pungently mixed with his sweat that the Orientals recoiled as he opened his palm. The Tunisian nodded, they were all present in Canton.

'The Gracious' traded in spices for two months at port. Jack wandered the city in a near religious ecstasy. He prayed whilst gazing upon the grand mosque, with its reliquary of Mohammed, as all things here seemed holy to him. If it was as the geographers said and spices truly came from some lost earthly Eden then they were part of a divine plan. And it was spices that had brought him to China and made him reborn, for he was no longer just a degenerado but the first English man in Canton and now an important and respected representative. So his rebirth had been divinely ordained. When "The Gracious" sailed Jack was offered the chance to go with them as a full crew member, or to stay with the Ming governor as an English teacher and spy until "The Gracious" returned. He stayed.

Jack set to work educating the governor's eunuchs in the English language. The process was slow, mostly because he eschewed the use of Genoese and Greek to help in class. Instead he would point, and say and they would recite. He became lonely.

His class were not ready yet to talk to him. He hadn't taught them the words they wanted to say. He never even learnt they were eunuchs. He hid his loneliness in wordless serving girls who lived unhappily with him until his palatial room had almost become a servant's quarters itself.

Eventually after 2 years Jack's pointing and miming had nearly paid off. He had taught them a vocabulary of 3,000 words, mostly useful in the field of trade in silk, spices and silver. They were ready to speak. They couldn't. They could say, "*I want 1000 shekels worth of oriente silke*". But they couldn't converse. Jack realised, he had only taught them the grammatical structure known today as the present simple. The most regular, simplest and least useful of structures. A common example would be, "I walk down the road".

Jack looked in desperation around him at the opulent divans where his students sat. "How do they describe this?" he thought. "The servant girl is fanning herself but not: the servant girl fans herself. The dog has been sleeping for hours but not: the dog is asleep, that doesn't tell you anything. Everything is in flux, it is happening, or "they are walking". If something isn't in flux then it is something that has been happening for a long time, or it is experiences, qualities, history or objects that somebody or something has brought into this room from the past."

His revelation was much like that of Heraclitus, 1000 years ago, "No man can cross the same river twice, for both himself and the river will have changed". Yet Jack's realisation was more modern in spirit. He could state it as, "No man can say "I cross the river" because by the time he says it both himself and the river may have



changed. Instead he can look back and extrapolate a process, "I am crossing the river", or a history, "I have been crossing the river for 2 minutes now."

Retiring to his room he thought of his own life and categorised it by his own version of what we now know as the 12 tenses of English.

Past perfect continuous: I had been ruining myself whilst I should have got an education.

Past perfect: I had carried my own ruin to China through trying to ignore the past.

Past simple: I wanted to only teach the present simple so I could escape having to talk about the past.

Past continuous: I was ignoring the fact the results of the past are not just carried with us but run contiguously up to the present.

Present perfect continuous: I have been making love incessantly less as a means to pleasure but more as a means of physical communication.

Present perfect: I have lost the faith that my arrival here was a rebirth as I now realise the extent the past impinges on the present even in grammatical structures.

Present simple: I realise however that the present simple can express not just wants but abstract or hypothetical ideas and the lack of any communication in this manner may represent an ideological gap between myself and my students.

Present continuous: I am realising my own experience of my existence is part of a continuous process where the future turns into the past and the baggage of the past affects the future

whilst the present is only an abstract idea.

Future perfect continuous: I will have been living for 27 years in two months more time - but that will also become part of the past.

Future perfect: I will have carried the past with me into the future, but that is only natural, it is what we do.

Future continuous: I will be teaching all the verb changes necessary to express these tenses for at least another two years until my students are able to talk about the reality of the human condition trapped between past, present and future.

Future simple: I will design an easier system so I have somebody to talk to, and maybe I shall even be remembered for it.

In the next lesson Jack explained: the past would be shown by pointing back over his shoulder; the present by pointing at the floor; and the future by pointing ahead. The further complications would be explained thus: the perfect would be represented as baggage carried over one shoulder; and the continuous would be represented by a restless shuffling of the feet.

Four years later Sir Michael Hobbs returned to Canton. Leading a train of camels, beaters, guards and slaves over what is now known as Vietnam, 70 of his hundred Englishmen had died and the rest were reduced to carrying their own packs. Pirates, Portuguese, Arabs and even now the Dutch had threatened his expedition. His letters of this period to Samuel Pepys reveal a kind of loneliness that may have fuelled his journey to Canton. He had 30 men with him but he missed the company of his degenerado, one of the



few men left who had seen the orient the way he had 10 years ago before new rifles, traders and anatomists had opened its very guts and found no religious revelations there.

He paused on the outskirts of the city limits, exhausted and bedraggled. Their bags were heavy with their belongings but they couldn't wait to throw it all away and fill it with precious spice. Sir Hobbs stared through his telescope at an imperial party ahead of him. Golden hats stood tall above sword like grass that cranes stood amidst. One courtier stood taller than the rest. Eight veiled women were behind him, and his guard held axes with silver crescents.

His hair was blonde like Sir Hobbs'.

"Jack Snow, come here!" Sir Hobbs shouted, waving his rifle and gesticulating wildly that he should approach him.

The tall blonde courtier turned to his guard. He pointed back over his shoulder to the imperial party.

"You're English your loyalty is to our King goddam you" shouted Sir Hobbs. His men ducked down into the grass.

The courtier pointed to the ground where he stood. The field shimmered in the heat. A fly was impossible to distinguish in the swarms. An individual fly even was impossible to see against the wet hot air. Every shape seemed to be sweating, a line or haze appearing around everything making it impossible to distinguish any edges. Both sides held flags and pendants but without a breeze both refused to unfurl and flopped lankly down their poles, this phenomenon giving the impression that both parties were representatives of the same

government whose symbol was the blank flag and whose depositions were always composed of one blonde leader and a team of local guards and servants.

Time rushed on, future turning into past.

A eunuch approached the English line. He paused. He pointed back over his shoulder and picked up an imaginary bag.

"Many of your men die", he said.

The blonde courtier behind him turned to his guards picked up imaginary baggage and shuffled hesitantly on his feet. The menace buzzed louder than the flies.

The eunuch spoke to Sir Hobbs again. This time he pointed down at the ground and shuffled his feet.

"Many of your men die", he said.

Silence. The eunuch wiped sweat and thought. He pointed ahead, to Sir Hobbs.

"Many of your men die", he said. Sir Hobbs shot him twice. His men shot at the blonde courtier and the imperial party.

The historians record only one man of the expedition returning to England in the 1640s and dying in the civil war. He had arrived old and lank haired with 2 nutmegs in his pockets and no knowledge of Jack Snow's system for representing and organising the tenses of the English language.

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# Teaching Collocations with the Word 'Mind', Using Concordance Data

by Michael Thomas

**The world of corpus linguistics is a fascinating one and this journal is always happy to hear of teachers delving into this area of study for the first time.**

**In this article Michael Thomas describes the process of implementing the use of concordance data into his classroom practices, in this case looking into the collocates of the word 'mind':**

## 1. Introduction

As a result of reading<sup>1</sup> and conversations with experienced teachers, I have recently become interested in and intrigued with the idea of using 'concordance data' to teach language and lexis. Moreover, I have realised that, when introducing my learners to new language, I have often been too focused on presenting structural rules. In this article I describe the approach and procedure of how I implemented a '*rule-discovery*'-based classroom method in which the learners were inductively able to develop their semantic understanding, through the use of concordance data, of collocations with an item of lexis – the word '*mind*' – relevant to their learning needs.

## 2. Pre-Lesson

### 2.1 Background: Language Corpora and Concordancing

<sup>1</sup>Lewis' '*Implementing the Lexical Approach*' has been influential in developing my interest in this area of ELT methodology.

A word may have many potential meanings but its actual meaning in any authentic written or spoken text is determined by its context: its collocations, structural patterns and practical function. "*Corpus software usually presents the examples for a word or a phrase in what is called a 'concordance', in KWIK (key word in context) format, with the selected word or phrase in the middle of the screen... Large language corpora offer access to words in a wide range of natural contexts, which can improve and enrich both language learning and teaching.*" (Krishnamurthy, 2007).

Tribble and Jones (1990:7) describe concordancing as "*locating all the occurrences of a particular word and listing the contexts*". Likewise, Levy (1990:178) defines concordancing as "*a collection of all the occurrences of a word, each in its own contextual environment together with references and word frequencies.*" Computer-based corpora, of which the largest and best known is the Collins Cobuild Corpus<sup>2</sup>, display all the contexts – as a set of citations or line references – in which a certain work or lexical set appears. Thus, concordance software provides a valuable language resource for learners and teachers alike, allowing not only for the exploration of large amounts of authentic language, but also a *visual* analysis of authentic language use.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.cobuild.collins.co.uk/](http://www.cobuild.collins.co.uk/). Others include the British National Corpus (<http://info.ox.ac.uk/bnc/>), ICAME (International Computer archive of Modern and Medieval English: <http://www.hit.uib.no/icame.html>).



The rationale for the use of concordancing in the ESL classroom, then, is one of authenticity and discovery. While lexical or language exercises produced for use in the classroom by the teacher “*can often contain inadvertently interjected artificiality*” (Mar, 1993: 2), material that is concordance based assures that contexts are authentic.

## 2.2 Approach

Both Thornbury (2000) and Harmer (1999) present activities similar in approach, yet distinct in terms of their overall objective. As will be demonstrated, the approach and procedure of my classroom implementation incorporates aspects from both.

Thornbury uses a set of concordance data from which the learners, using a ‘rule-discovery’-based approach, are able, through an analysis of the language, to develop their understanding of the target language (verbs – *stop, forget, remember* – that take both infinitive and –ing forms). Similarly, the approach upon which I have based my classroom implementation (*see section 2.3*), like Harmer, uses a set of concordance data to present and explore an item of lexis (the word ‘*mind*’).<sup>3</sup>

“*It makes little sense,*” argues Lewis (1998: 24) “*to ask learners ‘Do you know the word...’ with words such as mind, way, thing. Such words hardly have an existence independent of the multi-word phrases and expressions in which they occur. These words are mini idioms, where the meaning of the*

<sup>3</sup> Johns (1988: 11) argues that concordancing skills are applicable outside the classroom “*in the sense that piecing together coherent text from disconnected ideas or minimal clues lies very close to the heart of language learning and language use.*” Learners interact with text actively and analytically, rather than unreflectively and passively.

*phrase is not transparent from the component words...*”<sup>4</sup> Thus, as Lewis argues, part of the meaning of a word stems from the fact that it collocates with another word.<sup>5</sup> Such collocations vary in terms of strength; Lewis makes a distinction between *unique*<sup>6</sup>, *strong*<sup>7</sup>, *medium strong*<sup>8</sup> and *common*<sup>9</sup> collocations.

After looking at a number of contextual examples of the use of ‘*mind*’, the learners use an inductive, collaborative approach to formulate their own semantic conclusions, which some researchers believe is how many learners prefer to learn language (Lightbrown and Spada, 1993). Harmer (1999: 60) explains “*because the students have studied the computer printouts themselves – and worked out and discovered facts about the word – their understanding of the construction of the word and its grammatical surroundings is likely to be much greater and more profound.*”<sup>10</sup>

## 2.3 Procedure<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3.1 The learners become aware of a need for data

<sup>4</sup> Lewis (1998: 24) provides some examples: *It went right out of my mind / My mind's gone blank / I can't get it out of my mind / Sorry, my mind just wasn't on what I was doing / I'd go out of my mind if I had to / Why don't you... It'd take your mind off things.*

<sup>5</sup> As Martynska (2004) points out, the term *collocation* “*was first introduced by Firth in 1957 to define a combination of words associated with each other.*” Swan (2000) defines ‘collocation’ and the “conventional combination” of words. “*One can think of many adjectives that might be used with smoker to say that somebody smokes a lot – for example big, strong, hard, fierce, mad, devoted. It just so happens that English speakers have chosen to use heavy, and one has to know this in order to express the idea correctly.*”

<sup>6</sup> Examples: *to foot a bill / to shrug ones' shoulders.*

<sup>7</sup> Examples: *avid reader / budding author.*

<sup>8</sup> Examples: *magnificent house / significantly different.*

<sup>9</sup> Examples: *fast car / have dinner / a bit tired*

<sup>10</sup> Similarly, says Krishnamurthy, “[learners] notice patterns of usage and work out rules for themselves, and therefore remember them better.”

<sup>11</sup> The procedure is based upon Honeyfield’s four-step procedure for concordance-based teaching activities (1989: 44)



a) To engage and activate the learners' schemata, the learners, firstly in pairs, brainstorm as many examples as possible of the use of 'mind', after which they compare their answers in larger groups. Finally, I elicit the answers, making a record on the whiteboard (WB).

b) On the WB, I draw a mind-map from the center of which extends several branches representing particular semantic groups<sup>12</sup> for the use of 'mind'. Again, in pairs, the learners place their language (from 2.3.1a) into these groups; they are also given another opportunity to produce additional examples. Peer correction and class feedback follow, at the end of which the needs of the learners for the following stage have been established.

### 2.3.2 The learners consult concordance material

For reasons of practicality,<sup>13</sup> rather than allowing my learners access to an internet-based concordance corpus,<sup>14</sup> I provide a pre-prepared set of data that has been adapted to suit the needs of the learners according to the criteria described in 2.4.2. Indeed, "*the [concordance] data*", as Thornbury points out, "*need not be [entirely] authentic – it could be contrived or simplified, especially for lower levels.*" (2000: 67). Moreover, says Lewis, "*... it is important not to overwhelm the learners with too much data... [Even for higher level learners], the teacher may need to choose the most revealing lines from the larger set...*" (1998: 112).

<sup>12</sup> This activity has been adapted from *New Cutting Edge, Upper Intermediate* (2005: 48). The semantic groups are: *deciding & opinions / be careful / (not) a problem / -minded / spoken phrases / request / forgetting & remembering / thoughts.*

<sup>13</sup> The classrooms at the institution for which I work are without internet access. Also, class time restrictions would make it impractical to allow learners access to online concordance software.

<sup>14</sup> The concordance corpus from which the adapted lesson was taken is: [www.cobuild.collins.co.uk/](http://www.cobuild.collins.co.uk/)

He suggests using no more than eight concordance lines for lower intermediate learners and a maximum of 20/30 for higher level learners.

Working in small groups, the learners use the concordance data provided in the previous stage and, according to the approach outlined in 2.2, inductively analyse the various semantic uses of 'mind' and categorise each use, according to meaning, using the mind-map described in 2.3.1b.

"*In common with other rule-discovery approaches,*" says Thornbury (2000: 68), "*it is necessary to balance the losses and gains that accrue when the learner is actively involved in the learning process.*" I anticipated at this point that one loss might have been the amount of time taken to draw their own conclusions about the target language, resulting in possible time-management issues. Therefore, the learners, after having drawn some conclusions in their original groups, then form new groups, within each of which is one member representing each of the previous groups, so as to maximise the benefit in sharing their results, as well as minimize the time spent in doing so.

### 2.3 The learners apply the insights gained in the task

I adapted an exercise from *New Cutting Edge, Upper Intermediate* (2005: 48) to test the learners' semantic understanding of the target language. The test is valid in terms of its appropriateness to the classroom implementation's target language and its objectives as described in 2.5a/b.

### 2.4 Relevance

Tribble and Jones (1990) list the following criteria for the creation of a



general corpus of use in the ESL classroom:

- Use authentic language<sup>15</sup>
- Use contemporary texts
- Exclude archaic forms, dialect and technical material
- Stick to prose<sup>16</sup>

In this respect, “*relevance*”, says Stevens (1988), “*is achieved when the corpus of the text is appropriate to the language learners for whom the exercise is being prepared.*”

#### 2.4.1 Particular Contexts

- a) In China and Turkey alike, one of the greatest problems my learners have had in terms of their spoken and written production lie in their incorrect use of collocations. Much of this difficulty is a result of L1 interference. Though less so in Turkey, this was a particular problem in China, as English and Chinese bear very little structural or idiomatic similarity. Likewise, “in Turkish you *pull* trouble and photographs [in Welsh also, you pull a photograph: *tunnu llun*]; you *give* decisions; you *stay* (fail) in an exam; you *see* education, work and duty; it *comes* (seems) to me that...; you *become* an illness, injection or operation.” (Swan, 1987: 168).
- b) More so in China than in Turkey, very few of my learners had access to authentic texts, accentuating the

<sup>15</sup> Although most existing corpora are collections of authentic native speaker texts, concordancing with learner texts also provides an excellent tool for teachers and learners alike in examining recurrent patterns of errors, helping to identify and analyse, as Tribble and Jones (1990) suggest, learners’ problem areas in lexis, grammar and semantics.

<sup>16</sup> However, specialist corpora address the needs of a particular groups of learners as they are drawn from “... a specific area (e.g. scientific texts), a specific mode (e.g. journalism) or a specific medium (e.g. spoken language) [and] can provide very helpful data on a range of words and their particular patterns of usage within a given context or genre.” (Levy, 1990: 179).

problems many of them had in using correct collocations.

#### 2.4.2 Education in Turkey

Some of my learners have highlighted a recent methodological change in the Turkish education system. Traditionally based on ‘grammar translation’, including elements of ‘behaviourism’, such as drilling and other stimulus response activities, the weaknesses of which are evident in the poor level of spoken fluency and comprehension even among most high school graduates, a notable shift has been made in the past few years towards an approach to language learning that promotes a greater degree of learner autonomy. The classroom implementation described in this article is an extreme example of such an approach.

#### 2.4.3 Current Teaching Context

The relevance of this lesson to the learners to which it will be taught is as follows:

- a) The lesson is appropriate to the needs of my learners in terms of their timetable and course outline: they are nearing the end of an eight-week course based on Units 1-4 of *New Cutting Edge, Upper-Intermediate*, at the end of which they will be given a progress test in which questions concerning the target lexical item of the classroom implementation will be included.
- b) In the course of several weeks, having observed their spoken and written production, I have noticed that the majority make frequent collocational errors - ‘change my decision’ (instead of ‘change my mind’) – as well as structural errors – ‘would you mind not to do that’





(instead of 'would you mind not doing that).

- c) The lesson is appropriate to the learning styles of the majority of the learners. Pre-lesson questionnaires on learning style demonstrate that the learners are primarily visual and kinesthetic in learning style. Tribble and Jones (1990) point out that the real value of concordancing lies in the way in which language is visualised.
- d) As in 2.4.1b, very few of my learners have access to authentic written material either inside or outside the classroom. Some have expressed their dissatisfaction with the course book material and have requested that they be exposed to material more relevant to their language learning needs.

## 2.5 Objectives for the Implementation

- a) To see whether contextualising examples of the word 'mind' improved learners' understanding of its use and (idiomatic) meaning.
- b) To see whether the use of (semi) authentic, concordance material provided a clear, comprehensible context within which to infer the meaning of the target lexis.
- c) To see whether the learners enjoyed using a 'rule-discovery'-based approach to learning lexis.

## 2.6 Evaluation

*"Evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching... It is important for the teacher because it can provide a wealth of information to use for the future direction of classroom practice..."* (Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1993: 3).

## 2.6.1 Approach

As an illuminative<sup>17</sup> evaluation of the classroom implementation, I measured and assessed the effectiveness of the classroom implementation against the objectives of the lesson (see 2.5) by:

- a) *Recording the learner's immediate reaction to the lesson:* each learner would be given a post-lesson questionnaire from which I will be able to gauge their initial reaction to the lesson.
- b) *Providing the learners with a valid, practical and reliable test:* as part of the classroom implementation, in the final stage (see 2.3.4), I would test the learners' semantic understanding of the target language. This would demonstrate the extent of the classroom implementation's immediate, short-term benefit to the learners.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.6.2 Procedure / Technique

I measured and assessed the procedural effectiveness of the lesson through:

- a) *Peer-observation:* in order to gain an objective evaluation of the lesson's procedure and technique, I invited a colleague (from my institution) to observe the lesson,

<sup>17</sup> Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1993: 26) distinguish between *formative* evaluation, in which the process of evaluation is ongoing and "intended to improve the curriculum and gather information from different people over a period of time, and *illuminative* evaluation "which involves raising the consciousness of teachers and other ELT practitioners as to what actually happens (as opposed to what is supposed to happen) in the language teaching classroom."

<sup>18</sup> Ideally, I would gauge the longer-term benefit of the experimental approach by re-testing the learners one week after the experimental lesson. This would demonstrate the extent to which the learners had retained the benefit gained immediately subsequent to the experimental lesson. Unfortunately, the time constraints of the course syllabus will prevent me from doing so.



during which he completed an evaluation questionnaire. After the lesson, I conducted a short interview based on his answers to the questionnaire as well as any additional observations he had.

- b) *self-evaluation*: again, in order to gain as objective a self-evaluation, I videoed the classroom implementation, subsequent to which I was better able to analyse the effectiveness of the lesson's experimental procedure and technique according to the criteria used in the 'peer-observation questionnaire'.

### 3. Post-Lesson Evaluation

I divided my evaluation of the classroom implementation into two parts. Firstly, I looked at the experiment as a whole, focusing on its overall objectives and the implications for the use of concordance data / software in the classroom. Then, I evaluated the lesson in terms of the effectiveness of the procedure and materials. In both sections, I also suggested how adaptations could be made for future use.

#### 3.1 Evaluation of the classroom implementation

It is clear from my own observations of the classroom implementation, as well as those of my peer-observer and the learners themselves, that, to a certain extent, the learners were able to infer some semantic meaning from the concordance material, *meeting objectives 2.5a/b*. As the lesson progressed, their semantic understanding of the idiomatic uses of the target lexis was either *re-enforced* (as some stronger learners were already aware of some meanings),

*corrected*,<sup>19</sup> or as with many of the more idiomatic expressions, *established*. My peer-observer noted: "*there was a steady development in the learner's understanding... less so at the beginning, after reading the concordance data for the first time, than in the later stages of the lesson, after they had gone through various stages of clarification.*"

Moreover, through 'discovering' contextual examples of the target language, I was able to identify and address some structural issues regarding language use. One such issue that arose during the lesson was the use of 'would you mind + gerund / infinitive): after referring to the concordance data handout, the learners were able to determine that it's the gerund that follows.<sup>20</sup>

From watching the video of the lesson, I have observed that the learners' process of 'discovering' meaning involved the 'negotiation' of meaning between myself and the learners: the learners asked questions, either to myself or each other, and, in doing so, were able (in some cases, autonomously) to clarify their own personal understanding of meaning in a way suited to their own cognitive styles.<sup>21</sup> Watching the video has also, however, shown me that, rather than being able to discover meaning in an entirely autonomous way, it was sometimes necessary for me to 'lead' them to 'discovering' the meaning.

*Concerning objective 2.5b*, it's important to note that, although the

<sup>19</sup> At one point during the lesson, one learner ("he gave a piece of his mind") was peer-corrected ("he gave her a piece of his mind"). Moreover, this error exemplifies the relevance of the lesson to the needs of the learners, as stated in 2.4.3b.

<sup>20</sup> Although, in hindsight, I should have contrasted its meaning with the structure 'would you mind if I...?' and concept check its comparative meaning.

<sup>21</sup> At one point, a learner asked me if 'mind your own business' was more or less polite than 'it's none of your own business'.



majority of the examples in the concordance data handout were 'authentic' (in that they have been taken directly from the Collins Cobuild corpus), some had either been adapted or entirely re-written so as to provide a clearer context from which the learners could derive meaning. Even so, as I myself and my peer-observer noticed, some of the unadapted / authentic contextual examples were insufficiently clear.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, however, post-lesson learner feedback was largely positive: of the seven learners present, five described the process of inferring meaning from context as "easy" or "very easy."<sup>23</sup>

Concerning objective 2.5c, asked in their post-lesson questionnaires if they 'would like to do a similar lesson in the future', five of the seven learners responded enthusiastically<sup>24</sup>; two were "not sure." When asked what they enjoyed / didn't enjoy about the lesson, responses were mainly positive.

### 3.1.1 Action Points Specific to the classroom implementation

I intended to take the following action in relation to the future use of the experimental approach and procedure described in this article:

- Lewis (1998: 113) suggests using concordance software to explore semantic and structural differences between two 'confusable' words. This would be useful in addressing the needs of my Turkish learners with such commonly confusable lexical areas as *say/tell* or *lend/borrow*.
- Having already experimented with the use of concordance data to teach an item of lexis, I would use the approach again to present new language, as described by Thornbury (*see 2.2*).
- Krishnamurthy suggests using concordance software to explore not only lexical collocations, as has been demonstrated in this article, but also lexical 'frequency', or "*the number of times it appears in the corpus... Frequency*," he argues, "*can help us with single and multi-word units (such as compounds and phrases), grammatical patterns, or any other linguistic unit*," in as much as it allows the teacher to decide whether a word or phrase is important or not, and thus how much class time to allocate to teaching a particular item of lexis.
- I will experiment with the use of concordance data at lower levels.

### 3.2 Evaluation and Action Points Specific to the Lesson

My peer observer noted that, even though the language to which the learners were exposed was contextualized, very few, with some exceptions<sup>25</sup>, were given an opportunity to *use* the language in an authentic, less controlled context. This,

<sup>22</sup> This observation is confirmed by feedback from the 'post-observation learner questionnaires.' One learner observed that it was "a little bit complicated" understanding the meanings from context, although it should be taken into consideration that this particular learner arrived 30 minutes late. Another learner described the process of inferring meaning from the contextual examples as "complex".

<sup>23</sup> Whilst the 'post-lesson learner questionnaires' were anonymous, these opinions, in retrospect, seem less convincing and may reflect their view of what was 'expected' of them in terms of post-lesson feedback, rather than their actual opinions. For a more objective analysis of the lesson, I have placed greater emphasis on the 'Self / Peer-Observation questionnaire' results, as well as feedback from the video recording of the lesson.

<sup>24</sup> "It's [a] very useful way to learn [a] word's meaning."; "I'd like to do a similar lesson in the future because this way, the meanings of the verbs can stay in my memory and I can learn different meanings of one word."

<sup>25</sup> At several stages during the lesson, one of the learners asked me, "Do you mind if I speak Turkish?"

it seems to me in retrospect, would have been a more logical conclusion to the lesson.

### Conclusions

It is clear from the experiment that the main advantage of using concordance data to teach lexis lies in the authenticity of the language. Many of the learners responded with enthusiasm and extra motivation when the origin of the text was explained. At the same time, the languages' authenticity appeared, as I had expected before, and became apparent during the experiment, to be the biggest disadvantage of the approach, as many of the original, unadapted examples were, for some learners, ineffective in providing a clear context from which meaning could be inductively understood.


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After gaining experience teaching in China, Michael Thomas now lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey.

# How To Teach English

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# Academicus Electronicus

by Brandreth McClure

*An expert is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made, in a narrow field.*

**Niels Bohr**

*Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils.*

**(Louis) Hector Berlioz**

For this edition of the journal, I offer you, once again, two websites dedicated to the TEFL profession, one offering advice, the other a useful vocabulary resource:

## TEFL Tips: Useful tips for those teaching English

**Great tips for anyone in the TEFL profession. Nice layout, easy to navigate with and genuinely good advice.**

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**TEFL Tips**  
Useful tips for those teaching English.

TUESDAY, 6 MAY 2008

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I've been teaching for a while now and try as often as possible to help out people new to TEFL or new to Latin America. Below are some articles that may help you make the transition to living in Latin America. If you have any suggestions on what topics to add, please email me at naturegirl321@yahoo.com

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## Academic English Generator

**A multitude of useful activities for anyone learning or teaching the words on the AWL. Organised thematically by subject.**

*academicenglishgenerator.com*

**Academic English Generator**

generator  database

introduction	unit 1	unit 2	unit 3
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Developed by Sarah Robinson, Nanyang University, Australia



## *The PITs (Politically Incorrect Tasks)*

by Martin McMorrow

**Had enough of caring and sharing? Jaded by bland classroom chit-chat?**

**Here are a few activities that could be just right for those high-int low-morals discussion classes that you love to hate!**

### Activity 1: Confessions!

Materials: masks, 7 posters, small stiff cards (one each), a bell (optional).

Target language: You never! Top that! He had it coming to him.

Procedure: Participants all don 'penitent' masks, modelled on those worn in Holy Week in Seville - these can easily be made from old pillowcases. Seven tables are scattered around the room, each one of which is decorated with a poster representing one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The facilitator - perhaps dressed as Saint Peter/Petra - rings a bell and then names a person - eg your wife, your boss, Raymond Murphy etc and the 'penitents' have to go to that table representing the deadly sin they would - or have committed - in relation to that person. They then discuss their sins in their groups around the table and choose an appropriate number (between 1 and a million) of 'Hail Mary's' that their fellow sinners would need to say in order to gain absolution. Each sinner keeps his/her running total on 'penance cards' as they graduate from sin to sin. At the end of the activity, the participant with the greatest overall total of 'Hail Maryes' is declared 'the deadliest sinner'!

### Activity 2: A good Lei!

Materials: leis (Hawaiian style flower garlands), question cards, background music, a tambourine (optional).

Target language: Double entendre; gratuitous pun; wipe that schoolboy smirk off your face

Procedure - Participants are given question cards containing five Questions - and each is given a lei to wear around their neck. They mingle to suitable background music. Then, at the sound of the tambourine, participants stop and face the person next to them. But instead of talking directly to the person, they 'interview' the person's lei. They can ask up to 10 questions - selecting from those on their cards and then adding their own. These questions are to be directed at the 'lei' - but of course the person wearing it has to answer on behalf of their 'lei'. All the questions are designed to find out one basic point: Are you a good lei? After their five questions, they have to award the lei between one and five points. Then the music starts again and they move on to new leis. At the end of the activity, the person with the highest accumulated points total is declared 'A Really Good Lei'.

### Activity 3: Cane - and Able!

Materials: cards representing common forms of corporal punishment, score cards.

Target language: Adverbial and prepositional phrases; BDSM; swish



Procedure. Participants in groups of three or four. Cards representing different forms of corporal punishment (traditionally used at boarding schools) are placed face down in a pile. One person picks up the top card and has to begin: 'I deserve to be ... For instance 'caned'. The person on his / her left has to add a prepositional or adverbial phrase (eg by the matron) and then the next person adds one more (eg soundly) and so on (eg with gusto, despite my cries for mercy) etc until they run out of ideas. The person who fails to continue has a red mark 'scored' across his/her card, which

represents a pair of buttocks. If any participant receives more than five 'scores' they are 'sent to the infirmary' to recover. Groups are reformed from the remaining participants as and when necessary until there is an outright winner. He/she is then elected 'Head Boy or Girl' and receives 'fagging rights' for the rest of the week...

Martin McMorrow lives in Auckland, New Zealand and is proprietor of the Academic English Generator:

<http://academicenglishgenerator.com>

## The People behind the Websites

Sue Swift from ELT Notebook ([eltnotebook.blogspot.com](http://eltnotebook.blogspot.com))

**Sue Swift been an EFL teacher and teacher trainer for over thirty years has lived and worked in a variety of European and Asian countries. She is the author of a number of published courses, and runs a small language training business in Italy.**

**Her popular blog, ELT Notebook, is a blog for EFL teachers of all levels of experience. She has been kind enough to spare the time to talk to ELT World:**

**What were your initial aims when setting up ELT Notebook?**

I'd been involved in teacher training for about thirty years (eek!) and as I never throw anything away, had an enormous amount of material on file. It seemed sensible to put it on-line in

order to make it available to other people - and so that I could get rid of some files and make space in my very overcrowded office!

**How would you rate the health of the ELT profession in general?**

Mixed. Without going into whether or not globalisation is a good thing, it is happening and at the moment means that English is growing exponentially in importance. That means there's a lot of opportunity, and there are also some really good organisations doing quality work.

However, there are also a lot of cowboys who are exploiting both their students and their staff. Sadly, ELT is often still not a profession at all - there are still organisations who convince their customers that as long as the teacher is a native speaker that's all that's necessary. And there are even



more schools that see an initial qualification like the CELTA as the finishing point in the teacher's development rather than just the start. Unfortunately, these organisations damage the profession as a whole. If school X employs non-qualified teachers who are paid a pittance, their prices will inevitably undercut those of the professional organisations like school Y who ask for a CELTA and pay more for a DELTA, an MA, and experience. So school Y either goes out of business or ends up paying their qualified teachers a pittance too.

### **How important do you see sites such as the Rat Race Rebellion, for which you're a contributing expert?**

R3 excited me from the moment Mike Haaren, one of the site's founders, first contacted me. The site aims to help people take control of their lives by allowing them to control when, where and how they work.

I gave up working for other organisations in 1989, and you'd have to pay me an awful lot more money than is usually found in ELT to make me go back. Don't get me wrong - I worked for some great organisations, was never exploited, and would never have learnt what I did if I'd gone freelance earlier. I'm very, very grateful to all of the colleagues and bosses who I worked with. If I worked 60 hour weeks and ended up with burn-out it was my choice, never imposed. But there came a point when I'd had enough of achieving other people's objectives. I wanted to achieve my own - and that meant leaving time for things which weren't EFL related as well as those which were. And that's where R3 comes in. Their philosophy is that work is important - you should, as they say, be able to lock the office door. But there has to be time for other things too. Not only from a personal

point of view, but also because of the impact on families, the environment and society in general. The aim of the site is to provide people with the information and tools to make this possible.

### **What do you feel have been the major changes in the profession of the course of your years working in ELT?**

There have been many. When I took the DTEFLA exam (the precursor of both CELTA and DELTA) we were still in the era of audio-lingual methodology. The very last session on the course - you know, the one that is thrown in last because it has no relevance to the exam - was on communicative methodology, which was just starting to emerge. I can still remember it - it was given by Robert O'Neill and was a breath of fresh air. Over the next few years I was privileged to work with and study under people at the cutting edge of the communicative revolution - Alan Maley, Keith Johnson and Keith Morrow, Gill Sturtridge and David Wilkins - and it was probably the most exciting time of my career.

Then there is the way that technology has changed language teaching. When I started, I didn't even have a tape recorder in the classroom!

### **What would you like to see happen in the world of ELT?**

Three things:

a. Following on from my answer to the second question, the thing that I would most like to see happen would be for ELT to become a recognised profession, with a clear career progression where qualifications and experience were both essential and





well-remunerated, and the cowboys were excluded.

b. Similarly, I would like to see on-line teaching, which I think is the format of the future, become more professional and more regulated.

c. Finally, I would like to see a move away from the idea that native speakers are the only valid ELT professionals. Many non-native speakers are far better teachers, and have far more idea of students' problems, than the average native-

speaker teacher. Teachers should be assessed on overall professional competence, not just on their first language.

**Our thanks to Sue for taking the time to answer these questions. Please take a look at the excellent ELT Notebook, as well as Rat Race Rebellion. Sue is currently working on putting courses on-line for the new format Cambridge ESOL DELTA course modules at the DELTA Course blog.**

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