HUPE*zine*

inspire
& be inspired

HUPE

Hello Summer!

HUPE 29th International Conference

Valamar Poreč November 12-14 2021

Editor's Note

Dear HUPEzine readers,

I have enjoyed publishing HUPE issues for the last two years. As your editor, I certainly hope you have enjoyed reading them. We tried to present you all topics relevant not only to ELT but to new, sometimes challenging situations we all have been facing lately.

The time has come to reveal our latest issue before the Board elections. As your editor, I am extremely proud to present an article on mediation written by Livija Pribanić and Irena Pavlović. Irena Meštrović and Tajana Bundara have offered their contribution regarding teaching grammar after an article submitted by Jakob Patekar in our previous issue. How do they feel when it comes to grammar? Read the articles to find out. Arjana Blažić has given us an introduction on AI, as a closure to an amazing MOOC that many of you have participated in. Lidija Kralj writes about European Schoolnet Academy, tailored for teachers. Alenka Miljević and Goran Podunavac have shared their inspiring etwinning experiences that will provide us with new and fresh ideas for the next school year. Maja Labaš Horvat, Dajana jelavić, Suzana Mihelčić, Mia Šavrljuga…all extraordinary teachers with even more extraordinary ideas to share.

You all know that this year HUPE has started its Hall of Fame, so it is more than appropriate to start this issue with a letter that Marina Hadžiomerović addressed to all of hers and our HUPE soulmates. As for HUPE Board and your very own editor, we all greet you and hope to see you in London in August where we'll make a new Newsletter together. What will it be about? London, baby!

Enjoy,
Anita Žepina, HUPE Publications editor

Contributions:
The best way to support your association and the HUPEzine is to write to us and send us your contributions. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.
Write and send your contributions to the HUPEzine editor. Please, be sure to write your name, surname and affiliation / institution and address at the beginning or end of the text

Marina Hadžiomerović

FOR MY HUPE SOULMATES

I have been in primary education for a million years. I have tried out all the methods, task types and activities. I have followed each and every wise piece of advice, designed teaching materials, given workshops, shared everything with my fellow teachers, you name it.

I have always tried to do my best in every single respect, demanding perfection from myself as well as my students. Perfection is instant despair, says Iris Murdoch, and I completely agree. I have learnt from *Mrs. Višnja Anić* to KISS (keep it short and simple) and from *Mrs. Olinka Breka* that only the right challenge with achievable goals can give results. I have followed in the footsteps of my role models and dear colleagues with lifelong learning and constant improvement as our guiding light from day one.

I still haven't given up on learning how to use the new technology in the online environment. The only problem I need help with is communicating with the new breed of unrealistic permissive parents, who treat us, teachers, as servants to their spoilt princes and princesses. School anxiety has become the biggest issue. I used to be able to deal with my burn-out syndromes. Now I need help, but the helping verb to DO isn't going to do the trick this time!

Despite everything, I'm still not ready to give up. I have accepted the challenge of designing video lessons for our Ministry and Agency. I am working on my last one for 8th grade students finishing their primary education and feeling anxious about going to high school. Remembering how I felt at that time of my life brings back sweet nostalgic memories of a limitless world.

Entering the HUPE Hall of Fame has touched me deeply. I sincerely thank all my colleagues whose lives I have touched at some point, as well as those precious few who are still here in parallel slalom or zigzag.

Dear HUPE friends:

Whatever our problems are and whenever we feel we can't go on, remember that we English teachers are really an awesome batch: always caring, sharing, supporting one another as well as our students, eliciting joy wherever we are and appreciating those WOW moments in our teaching as well as life in general. We may be too loud and sometimes pushy, but we sincerely mean no harm. Without us, this world would be a much duller place. Therefore, thank you for the music, and keep on singing!

Livija Pribanić
Irena Pavlović

Hello, Mediation!

The concept of the world as a global village and the so far unseen advancement in the development of technology have brought numerous changes in our lifestyles, many of which refer to the way we communicate. It is highly likely we will need to communicate with a person who we do not share the same language with or perhaps with someone who does speak the same language but we still cannot reach mutual understanding due to differences in vernacular or jargon. Due to the concept of a global village, travelling and migrations have become a rule rather than an exception resulting in clashes of cultures and potential misunderstandings. When any of these situations happen, one of the potential solutions is linguistic mediation.

Do you remember 2016?

The concept itself is not new but in our country it somehow managed to fly below the radar. Even though it was introduced to Croatian EFL curriculum back in 2016, it was rarely mentioned until the autumn 2020 when teachers had to include it in their everyday work. But let us see how it lead to that.

Back to its origin and the basics

Linguistic mediation appeared in the CEFR in 1998. It is referred to as one of the language activities, together with reception, production and interaction. "In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies."[1] This early definition clearly shows what it is all about – in simple terms, linguistic mediation refers to facilitating communication between two or more speakers/groups who, for whatever reason, cannot communicate directly. It can be interlinguistic i.e. carried out between two different languages and intralinguistic which is carried out within the same language. Mediation is by its definition interactive regardless of the time the interaction happens – at the moment of interaction, making it direct, or after

the interaction making it, thus, delayed. Mediation may be spoken, written, spoken and written, but it may also be visual as very often pictures, graphs and diagrams are used. Being multimodal enables all parties in communication to choose or adapt the form. And finally, mediation is culturally encoded and these elements are the key elements in social interactions.
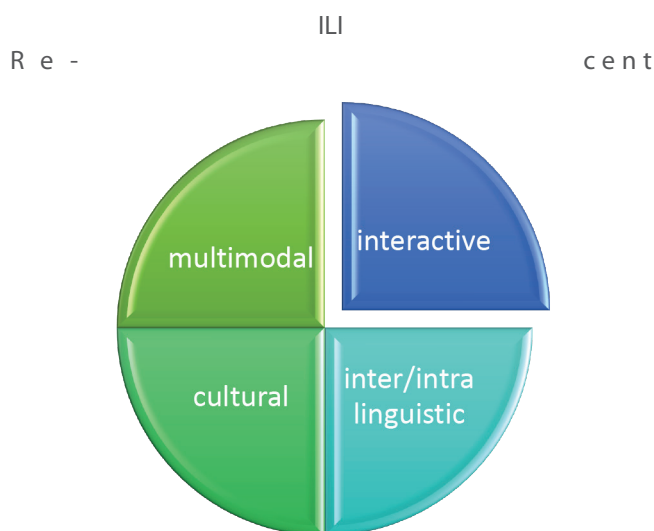
changes to the CEFR have focused on developing linguistic mediation as an integral part of language learning which led to it being included in the Croatian EFL curriculum. Nowadays, linguistic mediation is explained as a broad concept covering social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical aspects, but it still stems from a linguistic conflict that needs resolving i.e. comes down to the same notion: to help people communicate to solve a problem. Within the language learning context, it develops a combination of a number of skills (receptive, productive and interactive) and sub-skills (those involving the ability to reach agreement and identify cultural differences). In short, it is a lot more than just translation and summarizing as it is sometimes presented. Croatian EFL curriculum emphasises its importance by listing it as one of the elements of assessment in the final education stage in high school.

In the classroom

In terms of language learning, mediation involves activities such as summarizing, adapting, selecting, paraphrasing, simplifying information, negotiating, anticipating misunderstandings, identifying and clarifying cultural aspects,

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1 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment; Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg, 1998; Section 2.1.3., page 23; https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf

facilitating discussion as well as other ways of co-constructing meaning.

In order to make them meaningful, mediation activities should be related to the unit topic, involve skills or sub-skills as well as language being worked on in class, be supported by pre-mediation preparation and post-mediation tasks allowing students to reflect on skills developed, take into account cultural complexities of the activities, incorporate collaborative work and include a variety of both spoken and written tasks.

Task 1

Students have been working on the topic Well-being for some time. So far they have read a variety of texts on the topic and have acquired useful vocabulary. In the task that follows, they will work in groups and prepare a talk on teenage health in Croatia:

Group 1: analyse and present 5 most relevant pieces of information about mental health among teenagers in Croatia: https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Infografika-Mentalno-zdravlje-mladih-u-Hrvatskoj.pdf

Group 2: study the infographic and provide 5 tips for improving mental health: https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Budimo-aktivni-u-slobodno-vrijeme.pdf

Group 3: read the short text and report naming 5 simple tricks to overcome spring fever: https://javno-zdravlje.hr/19-proljetni-umor/

Group 4: read the text and create a menu for a week: https://javno-zdravlje.hr/jelovnik-za-proljetnu-sezonu/

Target audience: peers in the classroom

Student's work 1

From: XXXXXX

To: Karla Brown

Subject: Information about school

Dear Karla,

I'm writing you this to prepare you better for school and the place you're coming to visit.

You are coming to visit Srednja strukovna škola in Vinkovci, located at street Stanka Vraza 15. There are a lot of interesting professions in our school. Some of the professions are hairdresser, waiter, chef, fashion technician, tailor, etc. At our school you will enjoy a pleasant atmosphere.

Vinkovci is called the oldest town in Europe. You can visit the Sopot picnic area and see the cottages that were once built in swamps. Along the way to our school you can walk on the bridge under which the Bosut river passes. In our City Museum you can see all about our long tradition and culture.

It's not too cold in our town, I recommend you bring plenty of clothes for the days when it's warm, but certainly clothes for colder days. In our school dress code is that you should not dress anything too short and clothes that show too much skin, so you should not wear sleeveless shirts. In our school we dress mostly casual and comfortable.

I hope I helped you with this email and I look forward to you coming here.

Sincere greetings,

XXXXXX

This email has been awarded 11 points.

Task 2

Many English teachers organize virtual visits of groups of students from around the world. This creates a great opportunity to activate the cultural aspect of mediation. Divide students into pairs and let each pair come up with an example of a cultural concept typical for the region or the country. Pairs prepare short presentation about the concept and the class creates a poster with all concepts.
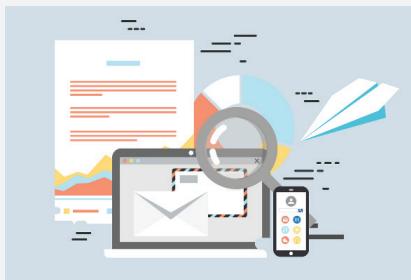Target audience: peers from a foreign country

Task 3 (see Appendix)

Imagine a British student your age arrives to your school in a month. Send him/her a welcoming email and include the following:
• Basic information about your school
• Fun information about your town/village
• Useful tips for packing.

Example 3 – Writing an email

This is your writing assignment. To complete it successfully follow the instructions and do not skip steps. Good luck!

Imagine a British student your age arrives to your school in a month. Send him/her a welcoming email and include the following:

- *basic information about your school*
- *fun information about your town/village*
- *useful tips for packing.*

Step 1 – Revise

Before you start writing your email make sure you know all the elements of an email: sender, receiver, subject, greetings, paragraphs.

Step 2 - Do your research

In this step you will be making a lot of notes!

Browse your school's webpage and find basic information about your school. Next, use the official tourist board page related to the are where you live and look for fun and interesting facts. Put yourself in the shoes of a foreigner travelling to an unknown destination – **what would you like to know?**

And finally, provide useful tips for packing taking into consideration the weather and school dress code.

Step 3 – Start writing

Use the notes from Step 2 and write the body of your email. Do not copy sentences from source texts! Bear in mind that you are writing to a teenager!

Step 4 – Finish your email

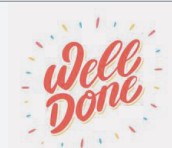Add all elements to the body of your email. (refer to Step 1)

Step 5 – Proofreading

Now it is time to check your spelling and grammar.

Step 6 – Check list

Before turning your assignment in, use the check list to make sure you have included all parts of the task in your email:

	✔️	❌
Elements of an email		
Information about my school		
Information about my town/village		
Tips for packing		
Language appropriate for target audience		
Spelling		
Grammar		

Well Done

	3	**2**	**1**
Organization	Email is correctly organized: contains subject line, greeting, correct paragraphing, closing.	More than 1 part of the email structure is missing / Overall understanding remains good.	More than 3 parts of the email structures are missing. / The text is difficult to follow and understand.
Format	Includes all features of an informal email (abbreviations, emoticons, slang).	Includes some features of an informal email, but largely resembles formal email.	Includes minimal number of features of an informal email.
Ideas	All 3 ideas fully developed.	All 3 ideas developed but some pieces of information are missing. / One idea not developed at all.	Only 1 idea fully developed.
Vocabulary	Effective choice and usage of vocabulary.	Errors in choice and/or usage cause rereading in places.	Errors in choice and/or usage make understanding difficult.
Grammar	Effective choice and usage of grammar.	Errors in choice and/or usage cause rereading in places.	Errors in choice and/or usage make understanding difficult.

Scale: 15, 14, 13 – excellent

12, 11 – very good

10, 9 – good

8, 7 - sufficient

And finally, assessment!

When assessing it, it is important to remember the principles of the communicative approach – you should assess the same way you taught. Make sure to rely on formative assessment first and most, including lots of self-assessment and peer assessment using check lists and rubrics and all sorts of complex tasks and projects. Start with simple CAN-DO statements, gradually introduce peer assessment and do not forget to create rubrics together with your students.

Arjana Blažić

AI Basics for Schools

When the term Artificial Intelligence (AI) is mentioned, many of us will immediately think of science fiction movies, powerful computers and robots that surpass human intelligence. However, even though we may not always recognize it, AI has already become an important part of our everyday lives and we often take it for granted: we use search engines and recommender systems, face detection and emotion recognition, security systems, voice assistants and chatbots on a daily basis.

AI is often defined as a computer system able to perform intelligent tasks that are usually associated with human beings, such as learning, problem-solving, decision-making and creating. AI technologies perform these tasks by constantly learning through experience, by analysing large amounts of data and by making predictions and decisions. Advancements in machine learning, natural language processing and the availability of large amounts of data have made AI the major technological revolution of our time, yet little about it is taught in our schools. That's why the EU Code Week initiative launched a new MOOC entitled AI Basics for Schools. As an instructional designer and external expert at European Schoolnet, I was assigned the task to design the concept and develop the content for this MOOC.

What is AI?

In the first module, the participants were provided with a handy timeline to explore the development of AI through history. They were introduced to the basic concepts of AI and learned about the subfields of AI, in particular machine learning and deep learning. They also discussed how computers process and analyse large amounts of natural language data, how artificial networks perform complex calculations and why computers are able to perform visual classification tasks better than people. We came to the conclusion that the AI we use today is in fact very limited and that computers and robots that exceed human intelligence do not exist (yet).
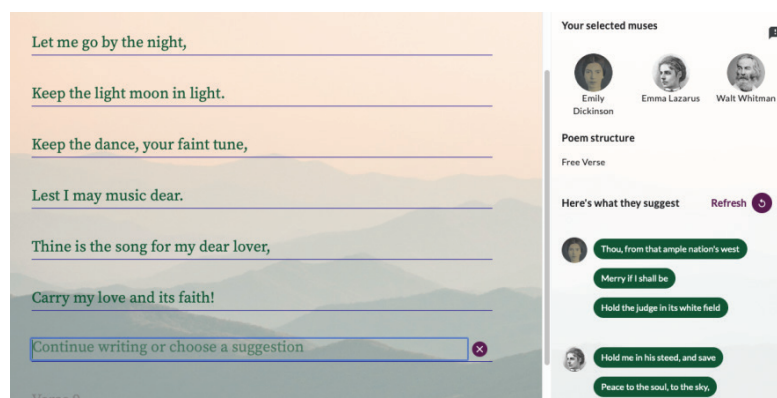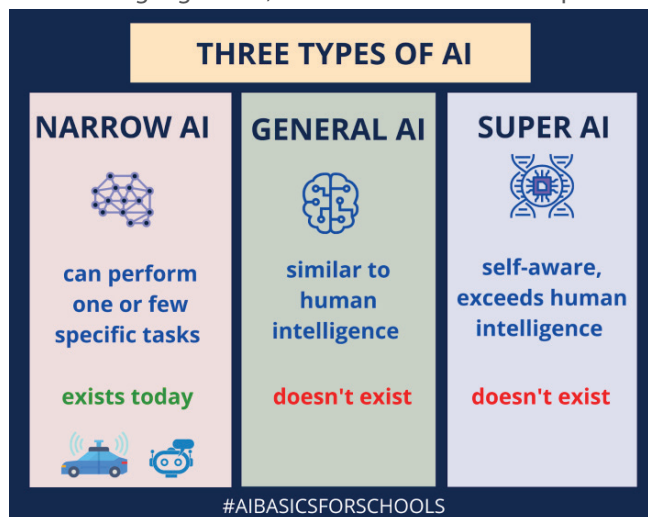
AIEd

In the second module, the participants were introduced to AI in Education (AIEd). AI is mainly used in applications and solutions that support learning for individual students. Many students already use language translators, language learning apps, math helpers, text to speech generators or automatic subtitling in their everyday schoolwork. AI has already shown great potential for supporting students with special needs in being responsive to students' abilities. There are also many examples of promising uses that foreshadow how AI might transform education: AI could accelerate personalized learning, provide students with continuous assessment and feedback and apply learning analytics to differentiate the learning process so that it is adapted to individual student needs in real-time. AI could help reduce the amount of time teachers spend on administrative work and repetitive tasks, free up their time and allow them to dedicate more time to supporting their students.

We analysed three different approaches to the implementation of AI in the classroom, depending on the learning objectives (Holmes, Neves, 2018):

1. Learning with AI - integrating AI technologies in the classroom to enhance student learning and to improve instruction.
There are already many tools that can be used to support language learning. My favourite is Verse by Verse, a tool that enables students to compose poems inspired by American poets.

THREE TYPES OF AI

NARROW AI — can perform one or few specific tasks — exists today

GENERAL AI — similar to human intelligence — doesn't exist

SUPER AI — self-aware, exceeds human intelligence — doesn't exist

#AIBASICSFORSCHOOLS

How about a singing challenge? Can you and your students sing like Freddie Mercury? Give it a try and have fun: FreddieMeter.

Check out Bakpax, an automatic grading tool that recognizes student handwriting. Students either complete their work online from any device or upload a photo of their paper.

2. Learning for AI – introducing students to the skills and knowledge required to deal with challenges in an AI-shaped world.
Besides learning how to teach problem-solving skills, computational thinking, coding and programming, the participants were provided with some ideas on how to teach data literacy skills in a fun and engaging way.

Quick, Draw! is an online game developed by Google that challenges players to draw a picture of an object or idea and then uses a neural network to guess what the drawings represent. Of course, it doesn't always guess correctly, but the more you draw, the more it will learn, increasing its ability to guess correctly! Over 15 million players have contributed millions of drawings playing Quick, Draw! These doodles are a unique data set that Google has recently open-sourced to help developers train new neural networks, researchers see patterns in how people around the world draw, and artists create things we haven't begun to think of. Data sets have been analysed many times and interesting findings have been identified. For example, you can check: *Most people seem to draw faces that are smiling, but people from all over the world have trouble drawing bicycles*, or do you know how long it takes to QuickDraw a dog?

What can you and your students learn from sets of data? You can play Quick Draw first, and then analyse a set of drawing of your choice here: Learning statistics is awesome. Select a word or a concept (e.g., guitar), sample size (max 300 drawings) and get a random set of drawings to analyse. Note that while this collection of drawings was individually moderated by Google, *it* may still contain inappropriate content. You can also flag inappropriate drawings and remove them from the set.

Introducing students to data literacy can start on a smaller scale. In this project, students developed their own smaller datasets by creating surveys on different topics for their classmates, analysing and extracting the collected data and presenting the results in a visual way: Let's learn infographics.

3. Learning AI – building our own AI.
Check out the following EU Code Week lesson plans that will help you introduce your students to creating their own AI:
Introduction to AI in the Classroom - a step-by-step guide on how to build AI to classify different objects with Google's Teachable Machine.
Learning in the Age of Intelligent Machines - a step-by-step guide on how to build a Covid-19 chatbot with Machine Learning for Kids.

AI challenges and benefits

In the third module, the participants examined ethical issues behind artificial intelligence. Despite the advantages and benefits of AIEd, we need to take into consideration potential and sometimes irreparable harm that may be caused by poor design, improper intentional or unintentional use and negative consequences of AI systems. AI has raised a number of ethical concerns including algorithmic bias, discrimination, fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy and surveillance. Find more information and

examples of algorithmic bias in this collection of videos. Use the videos in your classroom to stimulate discussion on algorithmic bias and to raise awareness of the harm AI can cause and learn how we can prevent it.

Bias and Discrimination

Unbalanced data
Data representation and measurement error
Cultural bias

Isolation and Hyper-personalisation

Highly personalized services, no exposure to different views and perspectives

Invasions of Privacy

Capture and extraction of data without the consent of the data subject

POTENTIAL HARMS CAUSED BY AI SYSTEMS

CodeWeek.   #AIBASICSFORSCHOOLS   Adapted from Leslie & Tuomi

Lack of Accountability

Is AI responsible for the outcomes?
Denial of Individual autonomy and rights

Non-Transparency and Unexplainability

AI decision-making process is not transparent nor can it be explained.
"AI Black Box "

Unreliability, Unsafety and Poor-Quality

Irresponsible data management, negligent design and production process

Rapid advances in AI have enabled the production of synthetic media, colloquially known as deepfakes. Deepfakes refer to algorithmic generation, manipulation and modification of audio tracks, videos, images and text for the purpose of misleading people or changing their original meaning. This may seem advanced technology and as such out of reach of our students, but it is not. For example, TikTok users can already use apps which allow for fast and easy face swapping in videos and photos and spread fake media, causing harm to their peers. I highly recommend using this crowd sourced selection of lesson plans to teach your students about the benefits and challenges of AI.

The MOOC attracted 2955 educators from 73 countries. The participants' feedback was beyond my wildest dreams: 88% rated it as very good and 11% as good whereas only 0.4% of the participants thought it was either poor or very poor. Even though the course is now finished and it is no longer moderated, you can still sign up for it here: AI Basics for School. You can listen to our guest speakers in the two live events organized as part of the course, explore the materials and resources and implement them in your classroom.

Lidija Kralj, Senior analyst @ Knowledge team, European Schoolnet

Professional development tailored for teachers - European Schoolnet

European Schoolnet (EUN) is the network of 32 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, EUN aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to all education stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.
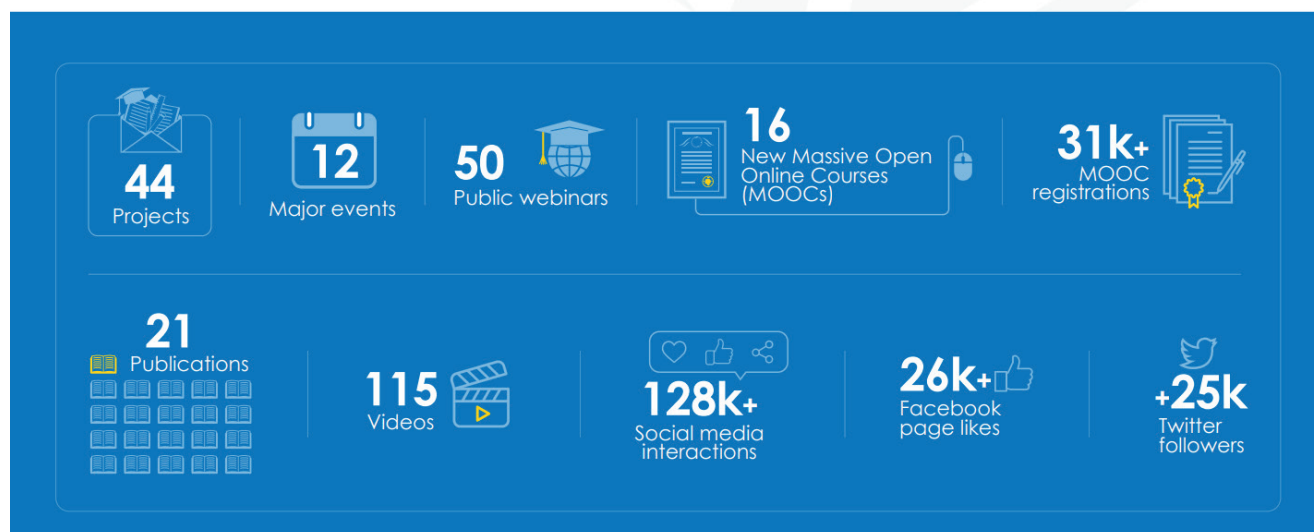
EUN activities encompass three strategic areas:
- Providing concrete evidence and data in the area of innovation in education on which to base policy recommendations
- Supporting schools and teachers in their teaching practices
- Developing and sustaining a network of schools engaged in innovative teaching and learning approaches.

The main objectives are to:
- Support collaboration & cooperation among schools in Europe
- Support professional development of teachers & school heads
- Offer pedagogical & information services with European added value
- Disseminate good practice & investigate new models for schooling & learning
- Contribute to the development of technology-enhanced learning in schools
- Provide services, content & tools based on ICT to members & partner networks

2020 in Numbers

44 Projects   **12** Major events   **50** Public webinars   **16** New Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)   **31k+** MOOC registrations

21 Publications   **115** Videos   **128k+** Social media interactions   **26k+** Facebook page likes   **+25k** Twitter followers
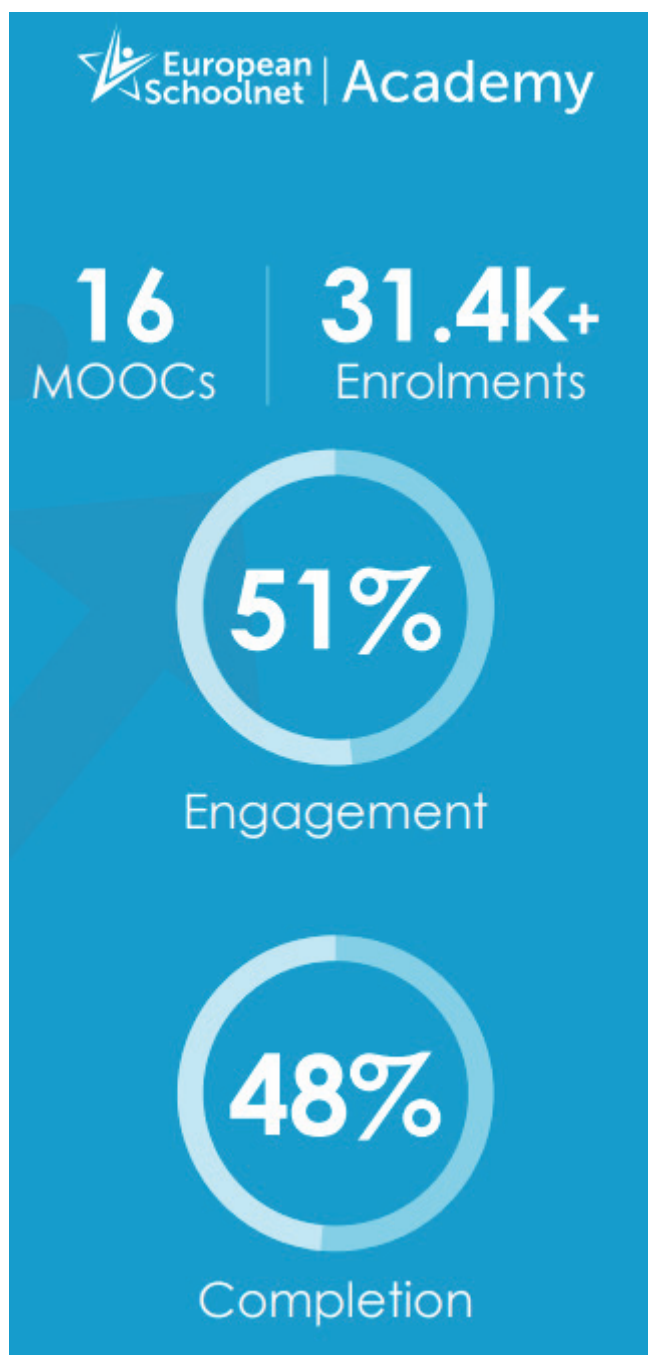
In 2020 EUN core activities were focused on testing, sharing evidence and spreading innovation in five areas:
1. Digital citizenship
2. Stem education
3. Evidence for innovation
4. Professional development
5. School networking

A sixth area of activity arose due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school community with the aim of supporting policy-makers and also practitioners in that period. Activities have been undertaken collaboratively with EUN members, partners and stakeholders, supported by several publicly and privately funded projects, as well as by European Schoolnet's Policy and Innovation Committee, the Learning Resource Exchange Subcommit-

tee and four working groups supported by Ministries of Education on indicators, digital citizenship, STEM education and the interactive classroom.

You can read more about European Schoolnet activities in 2020 in the Annual report 2020. http://www.eun.org/documents/411753/1866395/EUN+Annual+Report+2020+%28Web%29.pdf/01bd3803-dc1d-4518-bfa6-00456c68f71e

Plans for 2021

In 2020 a Call for Tenders was launched by the European Commission for the provision of a "platform and other services to support school education and of central support services for eTwinning 2021". EUN participated and has been awarded with a two-year contract (renewable until 2024). The new contract has important novelties: eTwinning, the School Education Gateway, the Teacher Academy, and all the other tools currently present will be organised under a 'unified platform' to guarantee a single entry-point for end-users and to avoid duplication of content and features. The new platform will be launched in 2022.

The technical infrastructure, so far managed by EUN, will be run by another organisation. EUN will continue overseeing its technical specifications, monitoring, and validation. All the content, professional development activities, coordination with national support services, community elements, and networking features will remain under the EUN's responsibility. The year 2021 will see a transition between the current format, which will remain mostly unaltered, and the new one, to be launched in 2022. All the activities where users are successfully participating will be kept and the theme of the year 2021 is dedicated to 'Media Literacy and disinformation', with a range of activities, campaigns, news, interviews, and projects to be developed around this key topic.

The participation of Teacher Training Institutions will be turned into a permanent strand called 'eTwinning for Future Teachers'. Professional Development and networking will continue engaging thousands of teachers across the continent, with a strong focus on online and blended education – a timely and essential contribution even more important in this period. In addition to the yearly theme, priorities such as active citizenship, early school, and VET education will blossom even more, with a renewed attention to rural areas.

The School Education Gateway will continue also in 2021 to provide stakeholders with information on European-level actions and initiatives for schools through articles, good practices, teaching materials, video interviews, surveys, and more. The platform also includes Teacher Academy that offers online courses and three Erasmus+ tools to support schools with Erasmus+ applications and projects. eTwinning and School Education Gateway, with all their services, will continue to represent an important component of EUN activities in 2021.

More about EUN activities in 2021 you can read in Work programme 2021. http://www.eun.org/documents/411753/1866395/EUN_Work_Programme_2021.pdf/e892dad6-3130-4342-a7d8-f1a7b99fc915

European Schoolnet Academy

The European Schoolnet Academy is Europe's first MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform offering high-quality free courses for primary and secondary school teachers as well as other educational professionals. The European Schoolnet Academy was launched in 2014 in response to the need to scale up professional development opportunities for teachers, so as to help them with the growing number of challenges they face in the classroom. The European Schoolnet Academy therefore primarily offers massive open online courses (MOOCs), which are entirely free of charge and open for anyone to join, with no limit to the number of participants.

On the European Schoolnet Academy, you will find a range of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) lasting between 3-8 weeks on various topics. Courses remain open indefinitely for anyone who would like to browse the content and find ways to improve their pedagogical practices. However, please note that after their original delivery, the courses will not be moderated and no certification is available. EUN courses are made by educational professionals for educational professionals, featuring content produced by teachers, teacher trainers and education experts.

As a teacher or other educational professional on European Schoolnet Academy you will:
- Learn about innovation in the classroom and school
- Develop and enhance your practice
- Get feedback on your work from peers and discuss the issues you face in your classroom
- Connect with like-minded peers across Europe
- Reflect and discuss the pedagogical use of technology in education
- Feel empowered and inspired to try out something new in your practice
- Earn certificates of participation and digital badges
Create lesson plans and other useful products that you can implement in your classroom.

European Schoolnet Academy courses offer you an introduction to innovative pedagogical concepts, whole-school strategies, and tools and resources which you can use in your daily teaching practice. They also allow you to reflect on your current practices, produce concrete outputs that you can use in your work, and engage with a large community of educators from across Europe to address the daily challenges you face.

Pedagogical approaches of European Schoolnet Academy is based on three premises:
1. The need to cost-effectively scale professional development offers to larger numbers of teachers, so as to give more teachers the opportunity to access and benefit from these.
2. The conviction that teachers need to be self-reflective practitioners, willing to interact with peers and with a high level of self-efficacy.
3. The fact that successful professional development encourages the development of learning communities where teachers share their expertise, according to research results.

The foundation of the European Schoolnet Academy course design lies in the learning theories of connectivism and social constructivism. **Social constructivism** suggests that learners are actively attempting to create meaning from experience. That process of creating meaning is usually a social process shaped by interactions with others. **Connectivism**, on the other hand, argues that in a digital age where knowledge is stored and readily available to everyone, learning is less about the acquisition of knowledge. Instead, it is more about the process of creating connections to people and content, and being able to navigate these connections to access the right knowledge when needed. Both theories emphasise the role of **connections between individuals** as central to the learning process. Accordingly, a key aim of most EUN courses is to establish meaningful connections between education professionals.

The main characteristic of European Schoolnet Academy courses are:
- Focus on teacher co-learning
- Bringing teachers together to exchange experiences stands at the forefront of all European Schoolnet Academy courses. Course activities encourage a joint reflection process that leads to the formulation of common ideas.

Developing course communities
- Getting teachers to share things and interact with one another requires a community of trust with a common narrative or purpose. In our courses we always try, therefore, to integrate community-building elements that build trust and purpose. Our course moderators encourage peer support and social presence, rather than relying on centralised support and instructor presence. Handing responsibility to the community, for example in peer-review scenarios, provides a clear goal and empowers teachers to develop a sense of ownership of their professional development.

Situated in the daily practices of teachers
- While theoretical pedagogical approaches are covered at times, our courses put more focus on everyday challenges in the classroom. Course content therefore often features teachers and students, or addresses very practical scenarios, such as classroom situations or the use of specific tools. This is possible thanks to

a process of bottom-up content production and the involvement of teachers as experts. In our courses, we also aim for participants to produce concrete course products that they can use in their daily practice, such as lesson plans, scenarios or resources.

Flexibility
• The limited number of deadlines and the use of primarily asynchronous activities provide teachers enough flexibility to take ownership of their own learning process. They decide when, where and how best to learn. We support this process with the advice and tools that help teachers reflect on their own learning and make such decisions.

You can read more about the principles behind European Schoolnet Academy courses in the European Schoolnet Academy blog.

We hope that by attending European Schoolnet Academy courses and engaging with your peers from across Europe, you will feel inspired to try out something new in your practice.

Alenka Miljević
Goran Podunavac

Online Professional Development Workshop for Rural Schools 2021

The Mediating Role of eTwinning in Small School Communities

eTwinning is a part of the Erasmus+ programme. It is an online platform where you can create a profile, find partners and start or join projects.

The platform is very popular with teachers and if you are an active eTwinning member you are also familiar with professional development opportunities that school staff have on the platform. You can take part in numerous events, that usually last for an hour, run by fellow teachers or experts invited by the central support service for eTwinning in Brussels. All you have to do is to find the online seminar that interests you and your application is just a click away. Another type of professional development is learning events run by experts which last 10 – 15 days. Due to COVID, eTwinning mobilities have also been run virtually. Just as for the learning events you have to apply for the conference and wait for your application to be approved.

Working in rural schools we were lucky enough to be able to take part from 21 – 23 April in an online professional development workshop for teachers working in rural schools organized by the Central Support Service for eTwinning in Brussels. The online conference consisted of three types of session formats: plenary sessions, workshops and networking activity.

The eTwinning Central Support Service opened the conference with a presentation about **eTwinning and Rural**

Schools / Challenges and Contributions. Unfortunately, the facts about rural areas in Europe match the ones in Croatia: it is an ageing population, only 59% of EU households have high-speed internet access, people are abandoning the countryside and the isolation that people are faced with living in rural areas limits access to services, employment opportunities and culture.
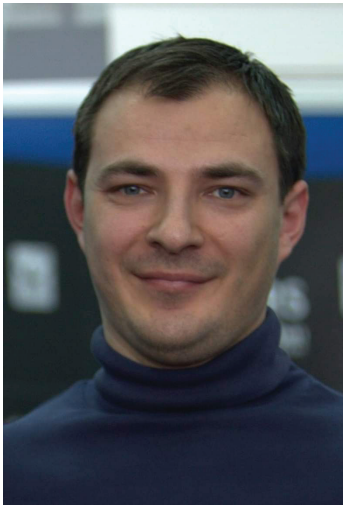
Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027

"The education and training system is increasingly part of the digital transformation and can harness its benefits and opportunities. However, it also needs to effectively manage the risks of the digital transformation, including the risk of an urban/rural digital divide where certain people can benefit more than others. The digital transformation in education is being driven by advances in connectivity; the widespread use of devices and digital applications; the need for individual flexibility and the ever-increasing demand for digital skills. The COVID-19 crisis, which has heavily impacted education and training, has accelerated the change and provided a learning experience." "Rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future." **Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission**

eTwinning enables teachers to connect all around Europe and its task is to raise awareness and learning, to identify challenges but also opportunities. Three points were stressed and the participants were asked to share their ideas on **Isolation / smaller communities** = warmer communities, **Multilevel Classrooms** and **Experience of the natural environment.**

At **Giuseppina Canella,** the main researcher, Indira, talked about Italian small and rural schools and the need to maintain high-quality standards in education and initiate the innovation process with a small number of pupils and sparse buildings. There are different standards for marking a school as a small one. It also depends on whether the school is primary or secondary.
Hargreaves (2009): in England, it is less than 100 pupils for primary schools and less than 600- 900 students for secondary schools. There is no standard in Italy.

The small rural school Manifesto in Italy has provided a proclamation about a rural schools' potential:
- Communities of memory and the quality of learning
- Technologies and social inclusion
- The multi-age classroom experience – a resource, not a limit

A national small schools network can represent an incentive to plan activities jointly and share the results among groups of teachers working on the same project. Small schools organized in the network in Italy are empowered to share their stories and teaching practices that are documented in a rural school "notebook". The importance of sharing practice has never been more useful but also available.
It is high time to officially recognize non-formal professional development that has its roots in the classroom – the place where best practice examples arise.

Professor **Malgorzata Żytko** *from the University of Warsaw talked about* **working in multilevel classes** *which is undoubtedly a challenge for teachers, but also an* opportunity to introduce new methods that are in line with modern pedagogical and psychological knowledge.

She pointed out that education in multilevel classes should use **modern pedagogical solutions** related to children›s learning and constructing knowledge in social interactions because it is a unique opportunity for such activities. It is worth organizing work during lessons in teams of different ages, taking into account tasks to choose from with different levels of difficulty.
In this case, teachers act as advisors and organizers of educational situations while **the potential of the students lies in their diversity** and this can be used by giving students the opportunity to be active and learn from each other in social interactions.

During the three days program, there were 10 workshops and each teacher could choose three of them to participate in:

1. Teachers/schools working with mixed-aged classrooms, Diego Armando
2. The power of non-formal learning in formal settings, Yolanda Jara
3. Let's make a challenge together: mixed classes of different ages, Edyta Borowicz-Czuchryta
4. eTwinning school in the rural area, Edyta Bieniek
5. From art to science - STEAM projects in school & university collaboration. eTwinning projects as a source of integration of the local environment, Tomasz Ordza
6. Motivating students to learn: Examples from history, James A. Diskant & Steven Stegers
7. Learning Communities, Salvador Páez
8. Use the UDL Lens to Empower the Learner to Become an Agent and Advocate of their Own Learning, Kathleen McClaskey
9. Bring Europe into your Rural School with eTwinning!, Katri Juusola
10. Cittaslow Movement for a more balanced way of life, Pier Giorgio Oliveti

Some conclusions made during workshops:

- Every classroom is diverse in its level regarding students' experiences, knowledge, interests and motivation
- Multi aged classrooms in small schools should implement the Montessori approach
- Mixed classrooms should be seen as a benefit as it is a more natural environment for children
- There should be a great amount of freedom given to teachers regarding the curriculum
- Schools' natural environment should be used as much as possible for teaching and learning providing students the opportunity to learn in an active way
- Teachers are not prepared to work in mixed classes and there are no courses that address these situations
- There is a trend among teachers in Poland to look for a job in rural schools and move there with their families as they see smaller communities as a benefit
- We should let students keep track of their own learning which will help teachers with an individual approach – such a portfolio will be implemented into the Book Creator application
- many rural school districts suffer from a severe teacher shortage because of poor traffic connections so many teachers prefer to work in the city

Our comments during the conference:

- there should be courses on teaching in mixed classes during teachers' education
- teachers who work in mixed classes should be invited to teach students and share their practice examples
- governments should pay more attention to rural schools in order to stop emigration
- eTwinning can help both teachers and students in rural schools to reduce the feeling of isolation
- eTwinning helps teachers keep up with new trends in teaching
- eTwinning puts our rural schools on the map so students get the chance to explore much more outside our small communities - positive impacts on the pupils' learning
- eTwinning helps students to learn in a collaborative, inclusive and interdisciplinary way especially if they are in a small class and don't have many peers like in our schools (only one student in the class)
- collaboration with other schools through eTwinning helps bring about more interaction, competence building and implementation of the school curriculum

Both our small rural schools, Primary school braće Radića, Bračević and Primary school Popovac, have been awarded the eTwinning School Label for 2021/22. We are proof that eTwinning doesn't only connect people across borders but also on a national level creating a network of teachers who collaborate, support, and understand each other.

Ana Žaja

Barcelona, Covid-19 and a few more things

It all started a little naively. Of course, I had heard of Erasmus, mobility, projects, but I didn't really dive into the essence of things until the project was accepted. This was followed by meetings, filling out forms, agreements and somehow everything was still far away ..... until we faced the dilemma TO GO or NOT TO GO (due to the Corona Virus outbreak). I was almost sure I wasn't going. Then we had a meeting. Heidi Škarica, our coordinator said: "Listen girls, of course you don't have to go, of course you will decide for yourselves, of course ..." I really don't want to list all things she mentioned. I realized: if I don't leave I have a problem, if I do I may not. I decided to go.

We made all the preparations, that morning at the Zadar bus station went well, I guess our husbands realized that it would only make it harder for us to leave if they showed how much they cared. The adventure began. Croatia is beautiful, we admired the highway, we expected clean toilets, but during the break on the highway, we were surprised by toilet containers. The hand sanitizers, which we brought in huge quantities, quickly became spent. Antonija said: "Girls, I took a couple of hundred disposable gloves for each, just in case." Well, we were a little upset.

Airports… Zagreb-Munich-Barcelona. Everything went smoothly. We met only a couple of people with face masks. Everything would be ok. We are big and smart. Shock at El Prat. Antonia's suitcase didn't arrive. How she coped with the situation, how she reacted… CHAPEAU! She filled out all the necessary forms at the airport and we headed for the hotel. The next 3 days for Antonia consisted of 'how to survive using a minimalist approach'. She looked like she didn't particularly care. Only she knew how she truly felt.

The course took place in the heart of Barcelona, in the Example district, at 15 La Rambla de Catalunya, a cosmopolitan street with countless cafes, a few steps from the famous Plaça de Catalunya. The classrooms were located in a beautiful building with an elevator like the ones from the movies…. We had classes every day either in the morning (9.30-14.15) or in the afternoon (14.00-18.45) so we had enough time to socialize and tour the beautiful city of Barcelona. Eight of us took the course. Besides the three of us, there was Tanja from Zagreb, Sylwia and Ewelina from Poland, Anna from Greece, and Annika from Sweden.

The first day we started off by getting to know Spanish cuisine, what to eat and drink. We then got to know the other students and became acquainted with the schools everyone came from and with the daily problems we all face. They were very surprised by the success of our students and all the activities we carry out.

Barcelona is a beautiful city full of many interesting sights to visit. Antoni Gaudi and his greatness are felt at every turn. His original works such as the Batllo house, the Mila house, two houses at the entrance to Guell Park and the unavoidable Sagrada Familia (it was literally unavoidable for us because we stayed in the Sagrada Familia hotel, which was a 5-minute-walk from the cathedral) seemed so unreal. Of course we tasted tapas, nachos, paella, empanadas, the famous sangria….

We revised/reviewed some things, and learned a lot. SWOT analysis, positive education, PERMA model, happiness in the classroom, Flow (ecstasy), emotions in the classroom, focus in school, life skills and their importance in life are topics which we devoted a lot of time to and applied later in the workshops that followed. We practiced how to express emotions without using our face, to draw and colour mandalas, to use lying eights, to practice brain gym and meditation. The last day of the course was an opportunity to design a project that we would do in school and which we would talk about on more than one occasion.

Mobility is a great opportunity for learning, for personal development, for getting to know other cultures, not only the country where the mobility takes place, but also the countries from which the participants come from.

On average, we walked about 10 kilometers a day, tasted something new from the rich and varied Spanish cuisine every day, tried to talk to the locals as much as possible and prepared for the next day of classes. I forgot to mention the course teacher, Mila Petkova, a Bulgarian by birth, and a longtime resident of Barcelona. At first, this doctor of psychology seemed a bit weird to us, as if she lived in a cloud, but as time went on we realized how she wanted to get us into the game. The theory was hers, and the practice was ours. The venue of our seminar was originally another location that was changed due to a weak internet connection. We don't know what the connection was like in the first planned place because, unfortunately, we had internet problems all the time. A few of us were disturbed by that.

I can imagine what it was like for those who came to the IT course held in the next room. Because of these problems, the participants shared examples of good practice, and in fact, the "Internet" issues have benefited us.

As part of the course, participants also receive a daily ticket for a 'hop on hop off' panoramic view of Barcelona. It was a wonderful experience. But if you ask me what I liked most about Barca, I don't need to think about it too much. It was the tour of Gracia, a lesser-known part of Barcelona that offers a completely different atmosphere. A part of the city without cars, without hotels, where the locals relax and socialize, a quiet area that exudes a bohemian atmosphere among cafes, restaurants, shops, and narrow streets. And the icing on the cake was our guide Alex, a professor of aesthetics at the University of Florence who was half-Italian from Florence (as he describes himself), and who made this tour as well as our stay truly memorable.

Danijela Takač, prof. savjetnik
OŠ Pantovčak

How to successfully organize virtual mobility in Erasmus+ projects

Tips & tricks

For the last three years, my school has been coordinating a KA229 project called *Sustainability – everyone's responsibility*. The partner schools in the project are from Poland, Portugal, Finland and France. We have been collaborating successfully until the outburst of the pandemic.

Just a week before the initial lockdown we were scheduled to host our partners in our school, OŠ Pantovčak in Zagreb, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to cancel at the last minute and prolong our project for another year.

Due to the still ongoing pandemic, we decided to organize two virtual mobilities in order to finish the project in due time. We organized a 5-day short-term student exchange and teacher training. I hope that this article is going to help you organize your own virtual mobility.

Well, let's start from the beginning. First, we contacted our national agency *Agencija za mobilnost i programe EU* in order to get the Annex for our contract. The Annex covers the financial side of virtual mobility. In addition, we were advised, as were our partners, to increase the number of students and teachers that were participating in the virtual mobility. In addition, we had to ask the parents to sign the permission GDPR slip for all the participating students.

After signing the Annex and gathering the permission slips, the Croatian team had numerous meetings in or-

der to divide the responsibilities and organize activities for teachers and students.

We used the communication platform Zoom for all these meetings.

During these meetings, we had to determine the standards and detailed directions for all the teachers and students involved. Apart from numerous meetings with the Croatian teacher team, we had meetings with the Croatian students that were participating in the short-term student exchange. We wanted to make this online mobility highly collaborative so we instructed and prepared our students to lead some of the workshops and taught them how to motivate other students to collaborate.

After having a completed draft of the programme we had to go through it with our partners and agree on it. We had five Zoom meetings with the partners in order to determine the dates and times of the mobility. Well, since Finland is one hour ahead of us and Portugal (Azores region) is 2 hours behind we had to find a time that suited everyone so we had agreed on the time frame from 2 PM till 6 PM.

We also agreed on which communication platform to use and we chose Zoom. Zoom turned out to be the perfect platform for several reasons.

Firstly, Zoom worked perfectly and there were not any setbacks. Breakout rooms were also perfect and we used them daily with more than 60 students. However, the most important thing for us was that if you are using the licenced

version there is a possibility to have as many hosts as you like. If the original host has any technical issues or is not able to start the meeting on any day, others can do it for him and add students to their assigned breakout rooms. This was the main reason we chose the Zoom platform to host the mobility.
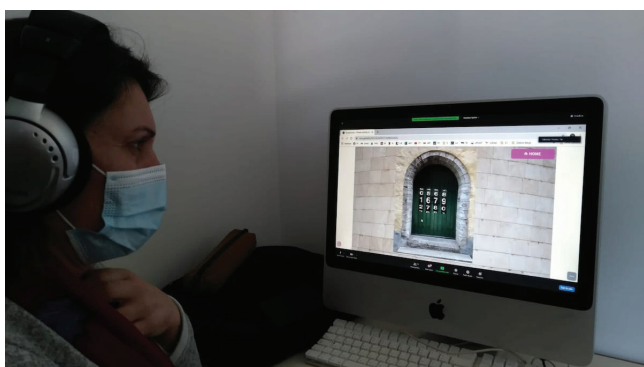
We opened a link to the 5-day mobility in advance so that the same link would be used for all the days and it worked perfectly.

Another thing we had to discuss with the partners was the usage of different web 2.0 tools that allow students to collaborate in real-time during the mobility.

Since, for the purpose of having successful virtual mobility, the Agency allows every partner to buy as many licences as you need and all the technical equipment (laptops, headphones, cameras, projectors) necessary, we also agreed on a few web tool licences.

We bought the licences for Zoom, Padlet, Pixton, Bookwid-

gets and Genially. So now, everything was ready and on the 12th of February, our virtual mobilities started.

Our activities were diverse and it was quite a challenge to host two virtual mobilities at the same time, one for teachers and one for students.

We had divided the students into international groups prior to the start of the mobility and used breakout rooms for their collaboration. We kept the students in the same groups throughout the mobility in order to allow them to get to know each other better. On the first day, the students were mostly shy and quiet. Even the ice-breaking activities did not help but keeping them in the same international groups proved to be a success by Friday, because they continued to talk to each other privately and on social media platforms and still do.
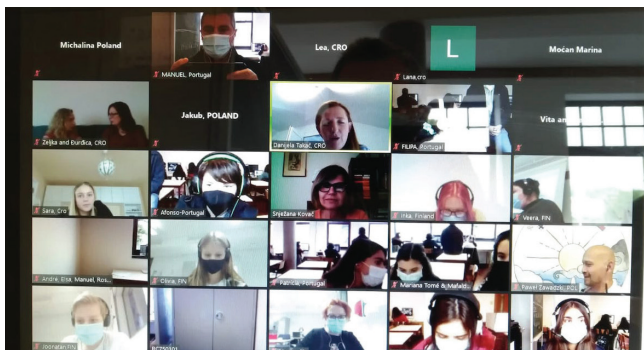

Some of our activities for teachers were workshops on how to use several tools in the classroom (Bookwidgets, Metaverse) and we had a discussion on Twinspace about the students' personal views and green goals connected to the UN Sustainable Goals. We calculated the amount of single-use plastic students and teachers use on a weekly basis.

Students worked collaboratively on a big 2-day workshop, *Slavic Mythology*, during which they had to visualize different Slavic myths in different web 2.0 tools depending on what group they were assigned to. It was quite a challenging workshop that opened our eyes to several difficulties we could have avoided. In some partner schools, some students were connected from their homes, which worked great, some connected from their schools individually but in some schools, there were 3 students per laptop.

That gave us a lot of communicational glitches apart from the language barrier.

So, the main advice I can give you is that if your students are collaborating in an international group, if possible, provide each student who is connecting from school with a laptop, headphones and a quiet place to join the meeting. We had some problems with the students being distracted and some could not hear their tasks. The use of headphones if one is connecting from a school should be mandatory to avoid noise distractions. Also, a camera should be obligatory especially in the first few days because when the students are presenting or leading a workshop they will feel more at ease seeing each other than talking to a black screen.

But even with all these initial difficulties, everything went smoothly and by Wednesday all the students were relaxed and were chatting to each other.
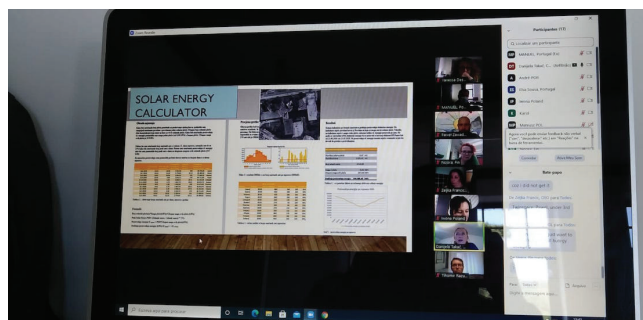
We had a lot of fun activities like making a Metaverse audiobook, Kahoot challenge, my avatar superpower, sharing good practice, and dissemination videos but the biggest success was a big escape room game made using Genial.ly that students and teachers competed in on the last day of the virtual meeting.

Students and teachers were assigned to their breakout rooms and one of the students from a group shared their screen and everyone collaborated to solve the game and win a prize. The questions were designed to cover all 5 countries so everyone had to participate in order to win. It was so enjoyable to see that the students were so excited. You can try the game on the following link: https://view.genial.ly/60124cfa0f83110d86b0eb8a and check out our project on: https://twinspace.etwinning.net/70353/pages/page/1378818 .

Although these virtual mobilities cannot replace the physical ones we ended the mobility with a full heart and tears in our eyes. As we all enjoyed it so much we have agreed to add a short 3-day virtual mobility to our new KA229 project as a bonus to the physical ones. These kinds of mobilities allow teachers and students from partner schools to get to know each other and stay connected until they can travel freely again.

Ivana Bokavšek, English teacher, teacher adviser
Elementary school Spinut, Split

Speaking in Our English Classroom
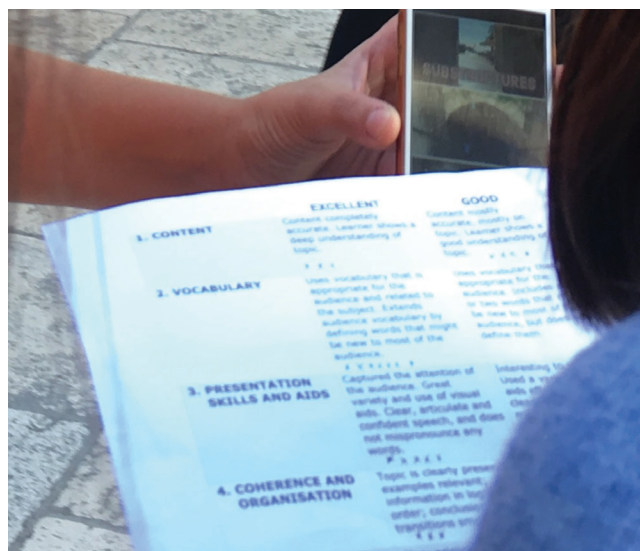
Speak up, please!

This exclamatory sentence does not sound motivational, does it? It carries more than just a slight note of impatience. We can say that it is strongly imperative without a shred of the listener's will to listen to or even an idle curiosity for what a speaker might say.

Unfortunately, this imperative can be often heard in our classrooms.

To restrain ourselves from giving that, not so pleasant instruction, we need to be aware of speaking as a process that cannot occur just as a natural human impulse to talk. It is not a foreign language acquisition that happens automatically, repeating after a model speaker. It requires a lot more to become a complete, natural-sounding, linguistically correct and meaningful verbal expression.

CLIL lessons rule, they make your class cool

Talking about the four basic language skills, their presence and their importance in foreign language learning, we can say that speaking mildly leads to that, so-called top list of the most important linguistic abilities. I have deliberately used the word "ability" as a synonym for competence because speaking requires, first of all, time, then frequent and constant practice in real situations. If it is not always possible to provide real situations, then we could organize a project context in which speaking makes sense, and we should not forget preparing, tutoring, encouraging and monitoring the students to verbalize their thoughts.

Obviously, speaking is a process and a result of the contin-uous exposure of learners to be heard by someone, rather than just an inborn competency that has been inherited.

Let me briefly refer to the fact that speaking is one of the most "presented" skills that foreign language learner develops, and I am not trying to say that it is at the expense of reading, writing or listening. I believe that they, more or less, exist equally in teaching and learning a foreign language, but speaking prevails because of its quickness in teacher-student communication, classroom management and expressing someone's ideas.

We can easily agree that speaking is a demanding, challenging, and lifelong learning process that unites different factors but, on the other hand, of similar significance are the use of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, and relevant content. We can add more essential elements to this list, such as presentation skills that cannot be left aside as less important. They are crucial when we talk about transferring the speaker's message to the audience and it is all about that, isn't it? Has the speaker been heard

and understood? Has the speaker managed to make an impact on the audience?

Speaking is a primary social skill that develops along with a speaker's inner growth; meaning evolves as the speaker's personal development grows. Speech is more or less structured, fine-tuned and fluent depending on the speaker's self-motivated pursuit of general and specific knowledge, literacy, ongoing education, and the influence of the speaker's micro and macro social environment.

What does speaking mean in our English classroom?

When I ask myself this question, the following situations rapidly fly through my mind: role-play, questions and answers (student-student; teacher-student and vice versa), mini discussion episodes where the most verbally skilled students often imposed themselves as mini-group leaders, describing photos or pictures, guessing the meaning or the point of a picture leaning again to provoking speaking by teacher questioning and similar activities and situations. These are formal and standard ways of setting up our classroom as a place where our students will accomplish their speaking goals, but still, I was not calm with this picture. Something was missing. Something that would fulfill the point of speaking itself where different communicational contexts and the students' ability to adjust to it, play together in harmony as one well-trained orchestra.

In 2015 I attended, as a part of an Erasmus + project, a course where I found what I needed to help my students develop their speaking skills. It was a bit of a mix of different parts, such as courage - to try different approaches, innovation - to implement a new way of making my students talk more efficiently with the use of digital tools, motivation - to motivate my students to make their speeches more interesting, correct, fluent, organized, and to become more self-confident. Then, during a field class in

Stockholm my group, which consisted of 5 teachers from different countries, was given the task of making a short documentary on a topic of our choice but the condition was that it needed to refer to the museum we were at that moment. We had two or three hours to make a story, right there, on the spot. Each of us needed to make our individual speaking parts that required some time for researching the field and eventually we had to make it into a film together. That meant that we needed to decide which photos to take for each part of the story and later on to edit the short film together. Quite a task! It was, indeed! But, we did it, successfully, more or less, but as a team and as individual learners. I can surely say we learned a lot!

As soon as I got back to my classroom in September 2015, I introduced a new way of speaking practice, PPT and Slidedog presentations. I used Slidedog as a presentational tool because I became aware of common students' reactions to their peers' presentations and I wanted to use a digital tool that could offer the possibility of peer formative assessment. It worked pretty well regardless of the poor conditions we had back then, such as the lack of wireless connection that was a huge obstacle to its regular use in my English classes. Students could follow the presentation on their mobile phones and they could take polls on the presentation and the speaker they had been listening to at the end of the presentation. The speaker could share the results with the audience and peer formative assessment was gained fairly. The premiere of Slidedog presentations was in May 2015, when my students made their speeches-presentations in front of their class and Spanish teachers, who were on job-shadowing mobility in my school and were observing classes for the whole week. It was a huge event for me and I can imagine what it meant to my students then! It wasn't their first "performance" in front of the class, but in front of foreign teachers, definitely yes.
What lead to that stage of a completely new speaking experience and their ability to stand in front of their mixed audience, conquer their fear of public speaking and speak about the topic that was not so easy to present, "Beauty is/isn't in the eye of the beholder"?

I needed to set up the rules, meaning that I limited the time of their performance, taught my students how to prepare visually attractive and appropriate slides paying attention to basic, simple rules like limiting the amounts of text on the slides, using just a few keywords/expressions and photos/pictures as their speech cues, and how to make their thoughts flow connecting them with the structure of the written text because, a presentation needs to be well - organized with an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Then many more small but crucial details, which make a successful presentation, came along.

Internet, to take photos and to make a digital poster.

To all participants' obvious pleasure, I can confirm that all learning outcomes were achieved and today still, without the presence of European teachers as their audience because of the pandemic caused by Covid-19, my students prepare and make their speeches equally well.

Since there is no perfection, so there is none here as well, flaws needs to be detected. Occasionally, a speech can be memorized by heart by students who are less verbally confident. And ask them a few questions on their topic they have prepared, just let them know you will do it. In this way, you will quickly check their comprehension.

In the course of these six years of constant practising a sort of public speaking, my students have gained the competence to present, using digital or hand-made posters, short films, or PPT presentations, a topic that, has connections with their everyday life and is multidisciplinary.

The best example is field classes in Diocletian's Palace in Split where the sixth and seventh graders presented the parts of the Palace to different teachers from EU countries who were on their job-shadowing mobilities in my school. Students were separated into two groups of six, or four of three, playing the role of a "tourist agency" and their "client" was a teacher guest who was observing the class. A guest teacher was given a speech assessment rubric and he/she needed to listen to every member's speech and decide which group had the best pitches. Students needed to make a digital poster which would represent gastronomy, accommodation, sights of historical importance, interesting facts, what to do there, and recommendations for tourists. They could use a mobile phone to browse the

Speaking reveals a speaker's weak and strong points. With our help, the latter one will definitely dominate in our classroom.

Mia Šavrljuga

THE TEACHING I.N.C.R.E.D.I.B.L.E.S. STRIKE BACK

Let's start with a bit of meditation. Imagine, if you will, the last time a lesson that you gave was incredible. Everything went according to plan (since there always is a plan and of course you don't just come into the classroom and wing it thank you very much), the students participated just as you had anticipated, everyone was motivated intrinsically, extrinsically and basically all kinds of motivationally from head to toe, and it all…just…clicked. Somehow. Now, the question is, why did it work? If you're finding it hard to come up with a precise answer, you're not alone. It seems that we're much more focused on the lessons that don't go down the planned route, than on the ones that do. And when everything functions, we usually take it in stride and chalk it up to a good day's work. Maybe we'll share our classroom success story with a friend or a family member, who, in turn, probably won't care unless they're teachers. In which case, they might ask you to share the winning worksheet with them. And we'll share it, of course, since we're a sharing-is-caring type of teaching people. But our teacher friend will often comment later, non-judgmentally but secretly judging slightly, that the fantastic material we shared with them didn't actually pan out as planned in their own classroom. So, what gives?

As it turns out, only having great materials at your disposal, does not a great lesson make. By whose authority, you might ask. Think about your own teaching experience; how often was it that the teaching material was the one crucial factor in your lesson success story? Of course, it doesn't hurt if what you're using to help facilitate your teaching is of great quality and tailor-made just for your lesson and your class, but there is some big-derrière research out there which might just make you rethink your, well, thinking. And then there's that good old gut feeling. You know it's there, no matter how little or much experience teaching you've had. There's always that little nagging voice in the back of your mind telling you that there must be something other than sheer magic happening when a lesson is incredible.

Now, for me, being a simple teacher with a penchant for hoarding printed materials and books, it took me a while to realize that the most important factor which makes a lesson incredible starts with the letter **I**. If you say it out loud, it makes much more sense and it becomes a word in its own right. My moment of epiphany was that a lesson is only as good as I make it to be. And it's got nothing to do with my degree or level of knowledge of a certain topic I might be trying to teach, but just the plain old human connection between my students and me, the teacher. I know. This all sounds a bit wishy-washy but various research indicates that the teacher-student connection trumps all else when it comes to motivation and subject matter acquisition.

While we're on the subject of learning, it seems that there are as many theories as to why it does or does not take place and how it actually functions as there are methods of making it work. Here, I'm not proposing anything revolutionary, but something simple that we sometimes push to the side in lieu of some flashier practices. So, here's a gentle reminder that the simple route to learning is sometimes the most efficient one. And there's no route simpler than **n**ote-taking. Think about it, to process and acquire something, it needs to become compartmentalised in our cerebral storage facility, and what requires some grunt work. **N**ote-taking, when done properly and thoughtfully, helps that storage facility run as smooth as clockwork. For ideas on how to visually present this technique to your students, why not check out this lovely cheat sheet on *The five most effective note-taking techniques* by Oxford Learning.

In case you were wondering, the *C* in *I.N.C.R.E.D.I.B.L.E.S.* comes from **C**ognitive Load Theory. OMG. That sounds incredibly high-brow and scientific-journally (I've made that word up; no need to look it up). In real life, the Cognitive Load Theory just means that you give to your students as much as they can take and you do it through strategies that are tried and tested in your classroom to maximise learning. So, pretty much what you've been doing all along every time you prep for a lesson or give it. Dunno, I find it quite cool to discover that the things we do as teachers actually have fancy-sounding names. So, here it is for your convenience, my suggestion is to just drop it casually in conversation next time someone comes in to monitor your lesson. You're welcome ☺

Reading, oh, reading. Or should I rather write argh? Here's the deal: reading is tricky. Reading comprehension even more so. There are several ways to get good reading materials, check them out below:

textbook	internet	authentic text	ready-made materials	invent-a-text
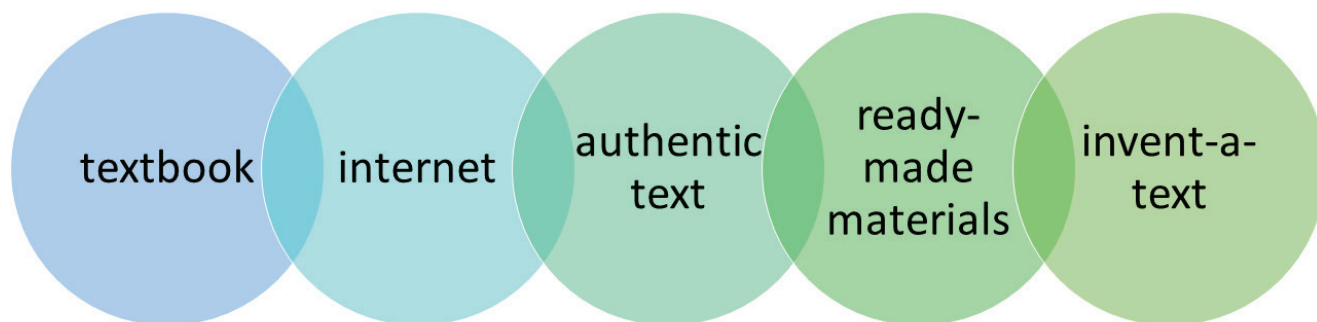
And whether you agree or disagree on ways of working the reading skill – pre-teaching vocabulary, including both new grammar and vocabulary in the same text, using pre-, during or post-reading tasks, etc. – the struggle is always the same: how to find good quality, appropriate and interesting reading materials our students will get the most out of. There are numerous ways, each one a preferred choice for the numerous teachers out there, but here's a little suggestion and maybe even a helping hand: a folder full of reading comprehension materials for perusing and using. I'll leave you to it.

What do you mark when it comes to your students' work: participation, homework, group work, punctuality, extra credit, performance? All of them? And how do you work out the scoring portion? May I be honest? I hate scoring. And I hate marking even more. It takes forever, it always seems there's a bit of inequality going on and quite often someone goes home dissatisfied. Enter **E**quity Scoring, your new perspective into scoring and marking. The fancy-schmancy title is just a roundabout way of calling it fair scoring and marking. Which is what happens when you take into consideration all aspects of your students when assessing them: from their forays into a certain subject area to their final achievements. I know, I know, oftentimes our hands are tied by the many layers of red tape we need to comply with while marking. But, think of it this way, before we start scoring and marking, why do we actually do it and what effect does it have on our students?

Equity vs. Equality
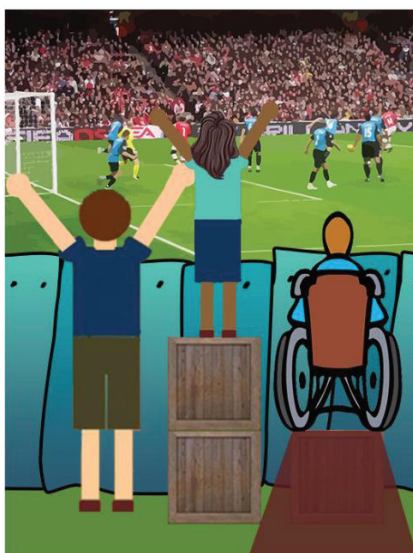
Same Treatment   **Equitable Treatment**   **The systemic barrier has been removed. This is Equality.**

www.canadianequality.ca

Let us now leave the roads not taken or less travelled, and embark rather on the familiar voyage of a trifecta of happy facilitators that do justice to every lesson, always: **D**iscussing, **I**nforming and **B**uilding up. I've capitalised them on purpose, because without them, a successful lesson would be just a lesson. They do what they say they do: they allow our students to discuss, allow us (and them) to inform them and they allow us to build up a certain focus point with slow determination. Speaking of which, if you're in need of some easy-fix building up when it comes to grammar, help yourselves to some really primordial grammar-based presentations. They might be old-fashioned, but they might just come in handy in a pinch.

Listening, oh, listening, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love when my textbook gives me appropriate listening tasks, so I don't have to scour the entire Internet for them. And if that's not enough, I can always rely on reliable online sources to do my bidding, namely British Council and Cambridge English. But, should all go down the drain and I found myself in times of trouble, a text-to-speech application might just do the trick. Thank heavens for the online giving tree – it never fails to disappoint. (But it does spend an exorbitant amount of your free time. Beware.)

With the danger of it sounding a bit like one of those home shopping channels, I need to tell you that when it comes to **E**liciting, or allowing our students to impart the knowledge that they've acquired, for me there's been a nifty little trick I've been using for some years now. Here it is, in its full glory:

> **EXTRA CREDIT!** For **one extra credit point** on either reading or listening or both, write in detail about something you know really well but haven't been asked on this test.

Looks cheap, but this short post-festum task at the end of every test I prepare for my students seems to do something extraordinary: it encourages those who are stressed out to destress and add something of their own to the extremely high-strung moment of testing. That one point does nothing for those who are way off the finishing line, but it can prove to be a nice little bump for those who are tethering in between.

To finish off our I.N.C.R.E.D.I.B.L.E.S., **S**elf-assessment would have probably been a logical ending. But, in my limited experience, because of the vicious circle that is human nature balancing the two-pronged abyss that is Impostor Syndrome and the Dunning-Kruger Effect (look them up, they're real!), maybe we should end with **S**peaking (and some **w**riting, too). After all, they form the foundation that is language learning. On how to foster and encourage it, I kindly ask you to refer to the previous 1500-ish words. Congratulations! If you're reading this, you've successfully reached the end of this droning text. And since it's just you and me now, I'll let you in on a little secret – the secret to a perfect lesson is… 42. So long, and thanks for all the fish.

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Teaching as Reflective Practice

Teacher professional development is very important to support teaching and learning processes. To help develop teaching and learning, language teachers should try teaching as reflective practice. Gnawali (2008) thinks that reflection helps teachers to "understand themselves, their practices and their learners" (p. 69). As teachers deliver face-to-face, blended and/or online teaching, they should keep reflecting on and developing their practice. Reflective teachers should be open-minded and their reflection should help link theory and practice. Teacher reflection is beneficial for teachers and students although there are some misconceptions. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused lots of educational changes and pedagogical challenges, so teacher reflection helps to develop more solutions for more emerging challenges. There are different approaches to teacher reflection.

Reflective Practice

Reflection is a key requirement for teacher professional development. It is the process that helps language teachers to question their everyday practice. Teachers work individually and in communities of practice to check what went well and what would be better in case it would be conducted differently. Reflection helps teachers to develop their performance through learning from their professional practices. It goes beyond checking previous practices into future improvements. It is beneficial for both pre-service and in-service language teachers. Bailey (1997) thinks that "reflective teaching is extremely valuable as a stance, a state of mind, a healthy, questioning attitude toward the practice of our profession" (p. 15).

Teacher reflection should be deliberate, purposeful, structured, and linking theory and practice. Teachers should practice reflection consciously and purposefully; they reflect because they need to develop both teaching and learning. Through reflection, teachers should link theory and practice by checking lesson plans and practices in a structured approach. They should reflect on teaching in order to develop students' learning. They should reflect to help change and develop teaching, learning and school practices. There are some principles of reflective practice. Reflective practice is evidence-based; when teachers reflect on their practices, they use evidence to develop practical insights. It involves dialogue; teachers communicate with peers to give, get and reflect on constructive, developmental and non-judgmental feedback. It explores beliefs and practices; teachers' beliefs impact on their teaching practices, therefore it is beneficial to explore such beliefs and their impact on practices. It is a way of life; it helps teachers, educators and professionals to get used to reflection as a part of their personal and professional behavior and development.

Reflective teachers should be open-minded, responsible and wholehearted. To be open-minded, teachers should have a desire to get, reflect on and act upon different feedback and insights from others including students and peers. They should pay attention to different possibilities and experiences. They should accept the possibility of errors. To be responsible, teachers should be fully aware of the possible consequences of their actions and practices in classrooms and schools. Therefore, they should plan, reflect on and act upon their teaching continuously. To be wholehearted, they should help to develop teaching, learning and professional development. To develop open-mindedness and responsibility is to develop wholeheartedness.

Reflective Cycle

According to Bartlett (1990), the reflective cycle consists of five steps. They are "mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting" (p. 209). At the mapping step, teachers observe their own teaching. They collect different pieces of evidence about their teaching by using different techniques. They answer the question, "What do we do as teachers?" At the informing step, they look for the meaning behind teaching plans they have developed in the previous step by sharing their plans with peers. They answer the question, "What is the meaning of our teaching?" At the contesting step, they try to find underlying reasons for their theory and practice. They answer the question, "How did we come this way?" At the appraising step, they continue to find out teaching alternatives. They answer the question, "How might we teach differently?" At the acting step, they act according to the reflective insights they have developed throughout the reflective cycle steps. They answer the question, "What and how shall we teach?" They should continue this cycle to keep reflective practice, teaching improvement and sustainable professional development. There are some misconceptions on teacher reflection. Some teachers think that reflection takes too much time. However, they can do reflection on action during teaching. Some teachers think that reflection focus is on teachers only. However, reflection helps to develop teaching, learning and teacher professional development as well. Some

teachers think that reflection is a negative practice or process. However, reflection is a cyclical process that helps to have a positive and developmental impact on teachers and students. Some teachers think that reflection is an individual process. However, there are different collaborative approaches and techniques for reflection.

Reflective practice is beneficial for teachers, students, educational leaders and supervisors. It helps to develop confident teachers who keep reflecting on and developing their practices. It helps to make sure teachers are responsible for themselves and their students as well throughout the teaching and learning processes. It helps to encourage innovation as reflective teachers find out, develop and implement innovative solutions for different challenges. It helps to encourage engagement of teachers and communities of practice using different individual and collaborative reflective practice approaches and techniques. These approaches and techniques help teachers to get, give, share, reflect on and act upon feedback.

Reflective Approaches

There are different approaches for teacher reflection. Reflection in action is teacher reflection during teaching. It happens during the lesson, so it helps to change practice at the time of teaching. Reflection on action is teacher reflection after teaching. It happens after the lesson, so it helps to develop practice for the future. There are different techniques for teachers to reflect on their teaching. They are shared planning, peer observation, self-reports, autobiographies, journal writing, collaborative diary and recording lessons.

- Shared planning helps teachers to reflect on teaching and learning by getting support from peers to plan lessons together.
- Peer observation helps teachers to go through each other's teaching. Therefore, they get critical reflection on their teaching.
- Self-reports help teachers to reflect on teaching by completing inventories or checklists that highlight their teaching practices during lessons.
- Autobiographies help teachers to reflect on teaching by keeping reflective and narrative records of their teaching professional experiences and progress. They help teachers to track the most and least effective aspects and possible future modifications of teaching.
- Journal writing helps teachers to reflect on teaching and professional development by keeping regular accounts of learning, teaching and professional development experiences. It helps teachers to reflect, share and check back from time to time to see how different experiences, events, interactions and sessions develop personal professional development. Journals can be written or virtual.

- Recording lessons helps teachers to reflect on teaching and professional development by keeping audio or video recording of different lessons. Audio or video recordings help to record the moment-to-moment teaching processes as many things happen simultaneously in the classroom.
- Critical analysis helps teachers to reflect on teaching and learning by answering and reflecting on specific teaching situations or practices. Teachers analyze a situation or practice in order to develop future performance.

Some teachers think that reflection is a negative practice that takes too much time. However, it is a key for teaching and learning improvement and professional development. It is beneficial for teachers, students, educational leaders and supervisors. It helps to link both theory and practice. It can be done in action during teaching or on action after teaching. Individual and group reflection approaches and techniques help teachers to check how their teaching has been delivered and how it will be delivered differently for future improvement. Teacher reflection should go systematically through a cycle of different steps. It helps to develop reflective teachers who are open-minded, responsible and wholehearted. Reflective teachers are highly interested in and responsible for developing teaching, learning and professional development, too. They help to initiate and sustain school improvement and educational change and development across classrooms and schools.

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Helga Kraljik & Ankica Šarić

PBL & ICT Based Learning: Organizing an Interactive Exhibition

Inspired by Jane Austen and 18th-century England, we organized an interactive exhibition in our school gallery. This project, awarded the European Language Label, was a perfect opportunity to implement PBL and ICT based learning as well as to encourage and foster better relationships between students, teachers, parents and the local community.

Our high school, Ban Josip Jelačić in Zaprešić, like many schools in small towns has a mix of programmes, for general and vocational education. We train our students in the fields of hotel and tourism, IT and economy; we also train future salespersons, hairdressers, beauticians, chefs, pastry chefs and waiters. Working in a school like ours can be a challenge when one wants to organize a project on a school level. The level of our students' English is very different as well as their motivation for learning it. That is why we always try to come up with different types and levels of activities so all our students can participate in the project. Besides achieving educational goals, if our students feel good about themselves while working on the project, the project is a success in our minds. Our project of an interactive exhibition was a project in which the whole school took part and there was a lot of positive energy connected with it.

We are always looking for something different, something that would be interesting to both, teachers and students. Of course, being teachers, the educational part plays an important role in all our projects. We didn't want our project to be the type of project which is done in a traditional way where teachers first teach and only then do students do their work. We wanted to use some of the innovative methods we had been learning about at online and onsite courses. All of these innovative methods promote putting students in the centre of learning; they put stress on the process itself and not the content. Students are the ones doing the work while the teachers are moderating. From numerous innovative methods, we chose PBL and ICT based learning for our project because they best suited our topic. We decided to create a project on Jane Austen. Since one of our chosen methods was PBL, the first thing we did was to come up with a driving question: *How to organize an interactive exhibition about Jane Austen?* The question was open-ended and it wasn't possible to google the answer.

Our next step was thinking about the aims. With this project we wanted to mark the anniversary of Jane Austen's death, we also wanted to develop our students' creativity, cooperation, critical thinking, communication, time management as well as entrepreneurial skills. One thing that we didn't want was for this project to be just an English language project so we included Art and some vocational subjects done by hairdressers, waiters and pastry chefs. In addition, our goal was to include special needs students in the project so they would feel more integrated. And last but not least, we felt that our project could help develop healthy relationships in our school by involving the students, teachers and other staff as well as parents.

Once the aims had been decided on, we had to define the outcomes as well. Our students were expected to do online research on Jane Austen, her work and the period in which she lived and worked, to analyse the materials and after that to design digital materials like infographics, posters, bookmarks, quizzes, puzzles…Our students were also expected to write the narration for an interview with Jane Austen and to film it, to create voice-overs for the films based on Jane Austen's work, and since one of the final results was an interactive exhibition, we expected our students to plan the exhibition and the opening ceremony speech. Some of the outcomes were very practical, our students had to set up an exhibition, collaborate with the media promoting the exhibition, plan the opening ceremony, as well as create costumes and hairdos from the Regency period and since we had planned a real exhibition, we wanted our students to organize an after-party after the opening ceremony.

After specifying the aims and outcomes, the following step was planning the activities. Most of the planning was done by the teachers but the students contributed with their ideas as well. Some activities were added according to their wishes like voice-overs and puzzles. Of course, we tried to include as many activities which promote higher-order skills as possible.

In order to plan the activities for the project, the Learning Designer tool was used because instant feedback is given on the activities in the form of a pie chart. It allowed us to create as many TLAs (Teaching and Learning Activities) as necessary and to make changes on the go.

As already mentioned, we planned for our project to be interdisciplinary. Besides working on the project in their English classes, students researched regency fashion in their Art classes, they painted inspired by Jane Austen's work, our hairdressers studied regency hairstyles in order to be able to make accurate hairdos for that period, as for the pastry chefs and waiters, and they planned the after-party inspired by English Cream Tea.

The exhibition itself was planned as an interactive exhibition. We mixed the traditional, paintings on the walls of our school gallery, and the modern, digital exhibits created with the help of online tools. That is why the exhibition was named *Jane Austen in the 21st Century*. The paintings were created by our students, and also their parents. This was the part where we managed to involve parents as well. Whole families were at the opening ceremony with students proudly showing what they had created. Students who don't usually excel at school, students with special needs, had the opportunity to show how good they were. One of the first activities our students had to do was to write the text for the interview with Jane Austen. This activity was done in teams. Each team was responsible for one part of her life, in the end, they combined all the questions and answers and decided what to leave in the interview they were going to film. They planned time travel for Jane in order to interview her. The students in the video were 1st graders from vocational programmes. The film was also an exhibit in the interactive exhibition. The film was first screened at the opening ceremony and for those who couldn't come to the opening, the film was available on the desktops together with some other digital exhibits. Moving to the modern part, the students also created digital posters which were used to promote the exhibition. The real paintings students and their parents created were scanned and used in digital posters, as well as on the bookmarks; students chose the quotes from Jane Austen's novels and designed the bookmarks which were given to the guests as a way to remember the exhibition. We wanted to promote reading and Jane Austen's novels with these bookmarks. The scanned paintings were used in most of the digital materials created using online tools. This was another way of combining the modern and the traditional. The students also created comics using digital tools. First, they watched the films based on Jane Austen's novels and then they designed the comics. Voice-overs were suggested by our students. They had a lot of fun making them as did the audience watching them. Some of the voiceovers were done in English and some in Croatian.

Since our exhibition was interactive, we had created some interactive materials such as a Kahoot quiz. In order to give the correct answer, the guests had to listen carefully to everything said during the opening ceremony and the interview with Jane Austen. Another interactive activity our students thought of was digital puzzles, again, puzzles made from the paintings and drawings they had painted. The last interactive activity was our guests leaving their comments about the exhibition in Awesome Screenshot and answering the question: *If Jane Austen really came to visit us today, what would you like to teach her/show her first?* on the Lino Wall.

To sum up, all the participants had a lot of fun working on this project, we managed to combine the traditional and the modern in an exhibition organized in our school gallery after working on it for half a year. All PBL projects have to have some results. Ours were the interactive exhibition we had organized, an eBook with all the materials from the exhibition as well as a Thinglink with some of the materials created. And last but not least, we have shared our project with the lesson plan on Edutorij. Since dissemination plays an important role in PBL, along with disseminating in school newspapers and our web page, we promoted our project in the media – TV Zapad and TV Mreža, and we also wrote an article for the platform eskole.

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Living and teaching through a pandemic

There are moments when I wake up, still completely disoriented and groggy from sleep, when the past year seems like it was part of the dream that woke me. That the world is still turning the way it had for the majority of my life, and that I'm about to get up and get ready for work. Unfortunately, it is minutes later, when my youngest daughter wakes up demanding my attention that I realize that nothing is like it was. I won't be getting ready for work, I won't be driving my daughters to school and day-care. We are at home, again. Nothing is like it used to be.

I still remember how I learnt of the new virus. I'd just come home, and my mother was sitting in front of the television completely shocked by the empty streets of China's cities shown on the news. I looked at the screen with very little interest, thinking this was just another story meant to achieve whatever purpose the world's leaders wanted it to have. I even remember going to my doctor where we talked about how ridiculous people were because they were panicking and not letting their children go to school with a mere cold.

It is funny when you think about it. How often the things we make fun of or take lightly actually happen to us. We all know how the story continued. First Italy went into lockdown, then most of Europe followed, and nothing, absolutely nothing was normal, usual or mundane. Our lives took a 180-degree turn, and with it or jobs.

A few years ago, while on maternity leave, I toyed with the idea of joining a company that conducted on-line English courses. I did some research on how to teach using videoconferencing and other internet tools. So by the time the first lockdown hit us, I was at least somewhat ready for what lay ahead. (I dismissed the idea soon after because I just could not imagine working from home with two children and teaching online.)

The first weeks of lockdown were brutal to everyone, I think. None of us was truly prepared for the new reality and what I once thought impossible – working from home with two young children around continuously – became possible. We were thrown into a whirlwind of being partners, parents and teachers at the same time, having all the time in the world and none at the same time, and it was difficult. Despite all the technology we surrounded ourselves with, it often happened - especially in those very early days - that it was not enough. The computers lacked some equipment, the internet was faulty, our students were computer illiterate. All of this resulted in us, teachers, working around the clock in order to do everything we would usually do, while at the same time resolving technical issues and emotional problems that began to arise in both our students and ourselves.

As teachers, we all have the tendency to acquire new knowledge, especially when we come across something that challenges us. Therefore, when we were faced with the reality of online teaching, we immersed ourselves into numerous courses that would help us motivate students online, courses that facilitated teaching over the internet, courses that explained the best and worst tools used in online teaching. For every idea you could think of, there was an online course that would teach you how to make it happen. All of these courses were and still are a great stepping stone, a tool, to help us get started. In hindsight, these courses were also a sort of therapy for teachers, because we tried to do all we could to normalise a situation that we found ourselves in and prove to ourselves that we could do it. Our superpower is learning, and so we learned, we adapted. We did it all, and have been doing it on and off for a year now.

Although not all courses we took and all the tools we tried were useful for us, the mere fact that we did not give up or settled was enough to give us the drive to work and survive.

However, the unending weekend we have been living, caused many of us to become burnt-out. Without a clearly defined line between work and free time, many of us worked twelve and more hour days. The number of tasks that needed to be accomplished in one day was often overwhelming. A simple task such as correcting a student's homework could take hours, because we had to do corrections of pictures, and the emails and questions would just never end.

The first lockdown was brutal. It took everything for us to figure out the best ways to navigate between teaching, correcting and living normal lives.

By the time the second lockdown came, we started capitalising on all the information from the various courses, teacher support groups on Facebook, and national teacher organisations that were supporting us from the beginning. To an even larger extent than before, we began to share ideas and tools we found to be the most useful. IATEFL as well as other organisations prepared online teacher conferences that gave us new insights and helped prepare us for future online teaching. To me, they were my saving grace. The conferences provided not only locally important classroom ideas and information but also gave us a place to exchange views on the whole online teaching situation, explain our frustrations and find solutions. Even just hearing that we all struggle with the same issues helped alleviate some of the stress.

Knowing what you want to do, and how to do it also helped. As mentioned, we learned a lot in those first couple of months of the pandemic. Even now, as some of us have been through a third lockdown, most of our ducks are already in order. We have our basic tools, those we've spent months exploring and trying out, and we have our support systems in place – whether they are our families, our colleagues or our teacher organizations. We are survivors, we are adapting and proving to the world that the role of teachers and schools in our society is not something to be neglected, but praised and cherished.

It's been over a year since we stepped onto the roller coaster of teaching and living in a pandemic, and although we may not like it, we know how to navigate in this new world. We can feel proud of ourselves for all that we have done, for all that we have accomplished. For never giving up and always fighting to give the best we can to our students.

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Distance online teaching experience with young learners

This article presents a personal experience of teaching English with young learners (1.2 and 3 grade) during the "corona pandemic" through a long-distance learning process. Although the online distance learning process has many traps, many factors have proved just the opposite that learners have completed and cooperated in such a process. "As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms.« »Distance learning, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning, the form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication« (Simmons, 2021).

Teaching English with young learners requires a different approach to teaching in ordinary times at school. The teaching method has to be adapted to learners´ needs and their developmental level. However, teaching English to young learners affected by national lockdown was even a greater challenge. Our learners are still very young, cannot write or read, and are not capable of learning completely individually. How to teach these young learners through a corona time and keep in touch with them and also maintain continuity within a foreign language was one of my main questions.

Slovene curriculum provides two lessons of English per week for young learners. I have decided to continue my lessons "alive online" with the Teams MS tool - one hour per week- one lesson lasted for half an hour. The second lesson for each class was designed as an individual work that contained guided instructions with a help of my recorded voice.

Firstly, I wanted to motivate all our learners to join the lessons that were going on alive online. These online les-

sons were not obligatory for our learners, but I wanted to stay in touch with my young learners. The motivation was one of my first concerns.

Secondly, I knew that without the help and the support of learners´ parents won´t be possible. This is why I kindly asked the parents to enable learners to join the lessons. Parents were satisfied with the scheduled online lessons because they had recognized the importance of the latter. I knew that my "class" will eventually become bigger, more observed than had ever been and that I have had hidden faces on the other side of the computer camera, but this was a sudden shift that without the cooperation among teachers and parents couldn´t be possible.

I had to decide which topics were appropriate for e-learning. I have used the methods and tools described below.

The emphasis was on stories, songs, and vocabulary input. We had been developing the listening and speaking competencies/comprehension. We practiced vocabulary, lexical items, and speaking by using new words in a well-known, simple sentence structures. I have used *Canva.com* for designing the handout because it provides attractive material for children. One can put in the *Canva* tool almost anything- from pictures, photos, different backgrounds, sounds… I have also used the *wheelsofnames.com* tool where one can create the game for revising vocabulary or speaking activity. For individual work, I have used *Wordwall.com* where I have designed many activities (classification of words, revision with the help of maize

chase, playing cards, memory games…) and *Educaplay.com* (many possibilities to record your voice, put in photos, design memory games for listening activities). When I wanted to get their feedback I have used the quizzes in *Genial.ly* or *Kahoot* where one has many options to create a quiz where learners are guided through your recorded voice and can choose the correct answers (listening competencies). I have also *used Liveworsheets* for creating my handouts for listening activities.

Although, all these new tools and applications were used I have always include movement and kinaesthetic games within each lesson. Young learners remember new things easily through their bodies that is why this bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence must not be forgotten in each learning unit. Some simple and safe games were possible to play through e-learning as well.

This kind of teaching has certainly been more demanding and more time-consuming but it was effective. When we came back to school we could proceed with the learning process normally. We had to revise and repeat everything in reality, but we have somehow managed to keep the continuity during the new teaching/learning reality.

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Dajana Jelavić

„The owner of the certificate has successfully completed the Online Professional English Network (OPEN) Program's 2021 Using Educational Technology in the English Language Classroom Global Online Course (GOC), instructed by Iowa State University. The OPEN program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The objective of this 64-hour GOC was to acquaint participants with technological tools and provide examples of how to integrate these tools into their own English language teaching. This course helped participants utilize technology in lesson planning, materials development, feedback, and assessment. It also prepared participants to use technology for the improvement of language learning and teaching, as well as professional communication, collaboration and efficiency."

After completing the course, I found certain insights and knowledge worth cascading throughout my professional community. I'd like to share my thoughts on technology-enhanced language acquisition, including vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as my lesson plans included in the portfolio as a final product of this course.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary learning is an important area of language instruction because meaning cannot be conveyed without vocabulary. Students should be given strategies for learning vocabulary in a focused and step-by-step manner; it should be learnt intentionally and incrementally, not just incidentally. I find two strategies worth mentioning: learning with "fanfiction" and COCA. Fandoms are online communities of fans where they interact in creative fan practices (fanfiction being one of them). Motivated by social relationships with others, students build new vocabulary and social media skills at the same time. Other aspects of word knowledge such as collocation, register, written and spoken form should not be neglected, so COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) can help to show word patterns to students. The corpus is another example of technology-based vocabulary learning and a great

resource to see how words are actually used in authentic contexts. The point here is to show that native speakers use language in ways that do not always follow definitions and rules that you may have learned about and to emphasize the importance of using authentic materials for language learning.

Grammar

Technology provides access to many different ways for teachers to study grammar, one of them is COCA. It can be used for working out the grammar rules based on authentic examples. It is a great methodology to uncover patterns in language that helps us gain insights into how language is used and learned. This type of language-based analysis that comes from the corpus has been a very interesting and revealing development in the study of grammar. Teachers can find many resources to teach grammar on the Internet, such as Everyday Grammar from Voice of America. One of the sections of the VOA website is English @the movies, to teach American English heard in the movies. If you want students to retain the knowledge, you need to teach them in a memorable way. In short movie clips, grammar is embedded in an authentic context and leaves a deep impression on language learners. This can be a starting point for developing your lesson plan on specific grammatical points, supplemented by samples from COCA.

Reading

WebFX Readability Test Tool and the Readability Analyzer gauge "readability" provides various information, such as number of sentences, number of words in a sentence, percent of complex words, average words per sentence, average syllables per word. Learners' experience and interaction with the text is much better when it is adapted to their age and language ability. Using readability tools prevents getting trapped in a sentence because it is too long and complicated, or giving up reading a text with too many complex words. This can also help in creating more appropriate teaching materials that students can use to achieve better results. For example, next time I prepare a cloze- test

for my class, I will use the readability tool to check the difficulty level (number of complex words, ease of reading...). Moreover, it is useful for jigsaw reading in mixed classes, as it measures the readability of each paragraph and allows you to assign easier parts of the text to the lower performing students. Readability tools can be used in different subjects and for different purposes, whenever we want a certain text to be fully benefited.

Writing

How students express themselves in writing is very important to their future life and success. Nowadays, technology allows them to communicate globally and even collaboratively in real-time. I have already used Google Docs in my classes and projects, mainly as a shared document for collaborative assignments. It provides great opportunities to build skills and collaborate through all stages of the writing process, negotiating, proposing, deciding, and editing. Collaboration is a skill that still needs to be developed, and it is also very important for students' future jobs where they are expected to work in teams. Our previous focus was on the end product and now it is on the writing process itself and that seems to be the biggest change that needs time and practice to be accepted.

By completing the course task, I had a different experience as a member of the team with the assigned role of content facilitator. As an insider, I gained a better perspective and understanding of all the challenges my students face in such an assignment.

One of the issues I encountered was participation within the team or sharing the workload equitably, which can be handled in class through the use of a rubric as well as peer assessment. In addition, there is another relevant aspect regarding distance learning and collaborative writing that I would like to mention: that is a social-emotional aspect of learning. The collaborative writing assignment helps an online class build a supportive community where the quality of writing can be improved through immediate feedback and guidance, and students do not feel isolated or abandoned, but as a valuable part of the team working towards a common goal.

In this type of writing activity, I would also highlight the fact that students view each other as a resource while building on each other's knowledge through trust in team members and collective scaffolding. In addition to all the features offered by Google doc., the final version of the written assignment can be checked with Grammarly, which instantly corrects spelling, grammar and word choice.

Listening

Listening is a very important skill because so much information is only available in English and only online. There are two types of listening skills: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down are skills that help students understand the main idea by predicting and discovering the meaning from discourse as well as visual cues. Bottom-up listening skills are being able to decode information based on vocabulary and grammar at the sentence level. Supersegmentals such as intonation are crucial to helping students decode information as well as being able to adapt to the speaker's variety. Technology allows us to create lessons that focus on short talks from TedEd/ TED Talks; news stories from the Voice of America website or podcasts from ESL Lab, to name a few. Students should also be encouraged to use resources such as subtitles, transcripts, repetition, reference materials, and images to support listening. They need to get plenty of practice listening to English outside of the classroom to better understand spoken language.

Speaking

There are two dimensions of speaking, fluency and accuracy, which should be taught in separate tasks, requiring time and patience. Students should not be corrected too often and they should not try to achieve the goal of native-like pronunciation. The goal of speaking instruction should be comprehensibility, not native-like pronunciation.

There are many technologies available to help with oral language; tools for listening to the pronunciation of words and connected speech; audio chat tools for collaborative work; tools to create narrated presentations and many more. To prepare before speaking, students can use YouGlish, a website based on YouTube, to check the pronunciation of certain words or phrases produced by different people in real contexts and accents. They can also save the examples or search results for their record. PowerPoint narrated presentation allows students to plan exactly what to say before they present and read from a script while they record their narration. Students usually feel reluctant to speak in class because they are afraid of making mistakes and if the class is large, they may rarely get an opportunity to speak, which makes the issue of practicing speaking skills even more relevant since they don't get any outside of class. Engaging students in speaking activities that give every voice a chance to be heard seems like a challenge for any teacher, but not an impossible mission thanks to technology.

Technology instruction and innovative strategies bring great opportunities, but also certain challenges that must be overcome gradually.

Most teachers find that the biggest change that comes with using technology for English language learning is that students are empowered to take charge of their own learning, they take an active role and that is the most important aspect of teaching. Teachers should use educational technologies to help students develop their agency as learners so that they can become life-long language learners capable of self-monitoring and evaluating their own learning and progress.

At the end of the course, a portfolio was created with all the important assignments, including Vocabulary in Social Media Presentation; Grammar Discovery Activity; Analyzing Reading Text; Collaborative Writing Assignment; Listening Materials Development; Teaching Speaking in Large Classes. My lesson plans, based on assigned resources and showing the integration of technology, can be viewed on **Edutorij**.

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Tajana Bundara

Teaching Grammar Communicatively

My Exit Ticket

Is there a best way to teach grammar? How can I make grammar more student-centred? What does this flashy title really mean?

I reinforced my knowledge in this online course OPEN (The Online Professional English Network) sponsored by the US Department of State with funding by the US Government and delivered by World Learning – Teaching Grammar Communicatively. So, I'll share with you what stuck with me after this course and present to you my TBLT grammar-oriented lesson plan hoping you will be able to create your own grammar-based TBLT lesson plan.

Providing students with opportunities to use the language in context and for personal use leads towards successful language learning. The Communicative Approach requires a lot of planning and it is time-consuming, but the result is genuine, which brings us to the two metaphors used to describe language learning – Brick Wall and Organic Garden.

Why metaphors? Well, they help us make sense of something complex. In this case, these two metaphors help create images to present second language learning theories. Brick Wall – 'Metaphorically, learning another language by this method is like constructing a wall. The language wall is built one linguistic 'brick' at a time. The easy grammatical bricks are laid at the bottom of the wall, providing a foundation for the more difficult ones. The task for the teacher and the learner is to get the linguistic bricks in the right order: first the word bricks, and then the sentence bricks. If the bricks are not in the correct order, the wall will collapse.' (Nunan, 1998: 101)

Organic Garden – 'Learners do not learn one thing perfectly, one at a time, but numerous things simultaneously (and imperfectly). The linguistic flowers do not all appear at the same time, nor do they grow at the same rate. Some even appear to wilt, for a time, before renewing their growth.' (Nunan, 1998: 102)

So, it's good to ask ourselves from time to time: 'What is our teaching strategy – Brick Wall or Organic Garden? What can we do to improve our teaching practice? What can we do/change to meet our students' needs, interests, and abilities?

Using authentic materials, building a learning environment where language forms can be recycled, drilled, creating a learning context that provides students with realizing the relation between form, meaning and use, leads towards grammar proficiency. (Nunan, 1998)

Nevertheless, there still might be a dilemma whether to use explicit/deductive or implicit/inductive teaching approach. The Inductive/implicit approach pre-assesses learning causes curiosity, students are active, learning is retained, and teaching is pupil-centred, but it takes more time to prepare, and if we provide the appropriate scaffolding, it won't turn into a guessing game. As for the deductive or explicit approach, the positives are that there may be less room for confusion, some students' and parents' expectations are met and teacher explanation of the rules might save time, however, the students are less likely to be engaged in the learning process and become bored, and can, in the long run, waste time, as the only way the teacher can observe learning is by giving a follow- up exam or exercises. (Global TEFL – Ron Bradley)

From my point of view, neither of them is better than the other, it all depends on our teaching context, and it is always good to keep in mind that variety is the spice of life, and when it comes to grammar teaching or teaching in general unless our teaching strategies are not diverse resembling a patchwork quilt, I would dare to say, they could be described as *Brick Wall Dead-End Streets*.

Since nobody likes to clip the students' wings in the process of learning and I presume we all like to grow Organic Gardens, I would like to share with you a TBLT (task-based language learning) lesson structure that might help you bring a new spark to your teaching context.

TBLT originates from the Communicative Approach stimulating students' learning process with real-life tasks. According to Ellis (2003), there is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language: students are focused on completing a task, and language is just a tool they have to use to achieve their goal (complete a non-linguistic task). Classes are student-centred and teachers are facilitators, leaders and organizers of discussions, managers of pair or group work providing feedback when necessary to accomplish accuracy. Implementing a TBLT task means choosing the right topic, and in this part, I value my students' ideas most. A choice is a powerful tool I tend to use in my teaching context. By giving them choice students feel empowered, it gives them an opportunity to connect with their interests and strengths. It helps trigger their intrinsic motivation. Once the topic has been set, a wide variety of TBLT tasks respecting the cognitive processes follows:
- Listing (a party list, a job list, a personality list…)
- Ordering and sorting (putting pictures and events in the correct order)

- Comparing and contrasting (food in different countries, music, graphic organizers…)
- Problem-solving (giving advice, planning a party…)
- Sharing personal experience (role-play, debating, storytelling…)
- Creative tasks (creating posters, videos, blogs, newspaper…)
(Willis and Willis, 2007)

A successful TBLT lesson plan means following through a clearly defined set of criteria. The first important step of the TBLT is a clear learning outcome – Why are we using this TBLT? What do we want to achieve with our students? The next step is the structure to be designed and followed through. This framework clearly outlines the three stages:
- Pre-task: Introduction
- Task-cycle: Task, Planning, Report
- Post-task: Analyses, Practice, Evaluation, and Reflection (Willis, 1996; Willis and Willis, 2007)

The Pre-task cycle serves the purpose of motivating the students. The teacher uses a text, a video, images, dialogues, recordings, etc. to introduce the topic and explaining the task. In the Task-cycle, the Task part, students work in pairs or small groups. They use whatever language they already know. The teacher provides help if needed. In the Planning stage students prepare to report (orally or in writing) on their task and the teacher acts as a language facilitator. In the Report stage, students present their work, while the teacher plays the role of a chairperson. And in the Post-task stage, the Analyses cycle, students examine and discuss specific items. The teacher presents grammar items or language structures to students. After the Analyses cycle, follows the Practice cycle. The teacher leads the students from Controlled practice activities, over to Guided practice and in the end provides them with Free practice activities. In the last stage, students reflect on the lesson and evaluate what they learned. (Willis, 1996; Willis and Willis 2007)

Here are some examples of practice activities.

Controlled practice activities
These activities mean repeated practice in accuracy and form of the grammar target. They are focused on repetition and drills. The various possibilities are: Repeat in the manner of the word, Disappearing dialogue, Running dictation, Jazz chants, Dictogloss.

Guided practice activities
During guided practice the teacher encourages students to practice skills on their own, it is a scaffolded independent practice where students are required to use the target grammar/vocabulary at a personal level. Here are some examples: Story chains, Two truths and a lie, Guessing games,

Quizzes, Guided practice with technology (Kahoot, Word-wall, Quizzes, Hot Potatoes, MS Forms, Google Forms).

Free practice activities
In this stage students have complete freedom with language production. This is the phase where they experiment, use previous grammar knowledge and other language items. Teachers could use: Information gap, Role-play, Debate, Discussion, Composing and Telling stories, Creating podcasts and videos, Writing blogs. It is important to emphasize that role-play is a TBLT task as long as it contains a problem-solving element, i.e. students are not supposed only to recite a part, but to engage in a meaningful argument to reach a solution.

(Teaching Grammar Communicatively, 2018)

When do I use it? I listen to my class' heartbeat, and always strive to create a teaching context that fits best my students' needs, meaning, from time to time, when my textbooks fail to comply with my students' needs, I SARS the textbooks (S – supplement, A – adapt, R – reject, S – substitute) and put my energy into creating a TBLT or PBL lesson plan aiming at fostering 21st-century skills, especially the 4Cc (collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking skills).

Our last task in this course was to create a lesson plan and the QR-code leads you right there. This lesson plan has an integrated culture element and is grammar-based. It is intended for the 5th grade and the focus is present continuous vs. present simple. My students enjoyed it during this learning session, they were highly motivated and engaged. A positive environment, various opportunities to communicate in an authentic situation gave them the confidence to use the language they know to complete the task, they interacted spontaneously, and it developed their confidence to achieve the communicative goal. Students' impressions are positive and collaboration with their peers fostered their communication skills, critical thinking skills and creativity. They were eager to learn, excited and played the role of active participants. TBLT contributes immensely not only to language learning but also to the students' social and emotional learning.

Image credit: pixabay.com

My conclusion is that teaching grammar is a complex process and needs a variety of approaches – variety is the spice of life and so it is of grammar teaching.
'Change is the only constant.' (Heraclitus)

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BAD READING TECHNIQUE OR DYSLEXIA?

The basis of reading and writing are speech and language. Our orthography is phonemic- one letter (grapheme) corresponds to one phoneme (spoken sound). This is a great advantage over some other, no-phonemic languages, and it is much easier to master the technique of reading in our language.

However, in our primary schools, there is a large number of children (20% -40%), who manifest difficulties in adopting reading and writing as a skill.

They are usually students of average intellectual abilities, without psychological and social problems.

Problems are detected only with the beginning of formal schooling when it turns out that for some reason they fail to meet the educational requirements placed before them.

Many scientific sessions, seminars, lectures, written books with a multidisciplinary approach were conducted, in order to present this phenomenon more closely and ultimately better understand it.

The phenomenon was first described more than a hundred years ago (1877), and since then it has occupied the attention of many experts, especially speech therapists, who deal with it the most and try to help students with their methods.

Thanks to the multidisciplinary approach, and the interest of a large number of experts, it was concluded that there is a difference between the "dyslexic brain" and the brain of a person without reading difficulties.
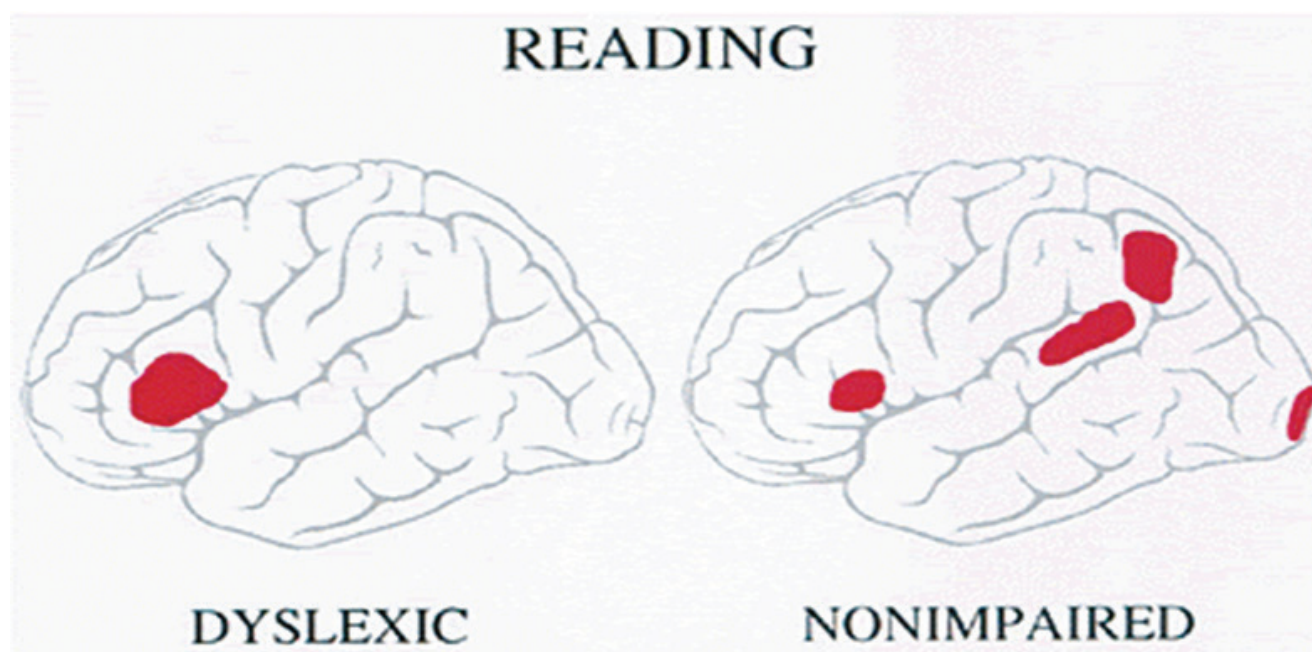
Stephenson, J. (1998). Mapping the dyslexic brain. JAMA, 279(15), 1153-1153.
Brain activity during reading

It was concluded that part of the left temporal lobe in dyslexics is not active enough. In people without reading disabilities, during reading, the active area of the brain is areas responsible for language comprehension (Wernicke's) area, as well as the part of the brain responsible for phonological processing and visual perception. The motor area of the brain, responsible for articulation and syntax (Broca's area), is equally active in reading aloud in dyslexics and in people who do not have difficulty reading.

It was concluded that in people with dyslexia there is a clustering of neurons and excessive activation of the Broca's area, and thus compensate for the insufficient activation in the posterior parts of the brain.

Reading is a complex skill because it presupposes the transfer of visual code to speech (reading aloud), or to subvocalic reading, which requires the adoption of phonetic and linguistic structures.

There are three main models of reading: reading aloud, subvocalic reading, and self-reading.

Reading aloud is characteristic of younger school-age children, at the very beginning of reading and writing training. By reading aloud, the child makes a connection between letters (graphemes), sound images of a letter (phonemes), and pronunciations (articulations). By reading aloud the person checks the accuracy of the spoken voice and the connection with the image of the letter. Reading aloud also helps us to better concentrate, remember and comprehend reading text.

Subvocalic reading is similar to reading aloud, with no volume. It is interesting that during this way of reading, all speech organs are moved, even the vocal cords, but the strength of the impulse that reaches the vocal cords is insufficient for the volume. This way of reading can be used by good readers when they want to review the text quickly.

Self-reading is a way of reading that relies only on the visual processing of letters - graphemes. When reading, the eye does not perceive letter by letter, but encompasses the whole picture of words, and sometimes more words at once, and becomes the main analyzer during reading.

Depending on the reading method the child is using and the child's age, we are talking about a reading technique which can be adopted, to the level of the child's age or below. The reading technique itself, in the context of reading, is not of great importance if there is a lack of understanding of what is read. Reading only makes sense if we know what we have read about, i.e. we understand what we have read.

In the initial reading training, the child pays all his attention to separating each letter, naming the letter and connecting it with the next letter, and the content comes into the background. Over time, and through regular exercise, the eye becomes more deftly and easily begins to analyze syllables, then shorter words and later multi-syllable words, i.e. multiple words at once. This is a lengthy process which will not apply the same for everyone and requires a certain degree of physiological and psychological maturity of the child.

According to the data on the website of the Croatian Association for Dyslexia, there are about 5 to 10% of people with dyslexia in the Croatian population.

However, cases with true dyslexia are very rare. It is mostly an unmastered reading technique, and the cause is in a large percentage a socio-economic factor of the family, low level of education, or neglect of the child. The number of children with inadequate reading techniques has increased in the last twenty years, and the main reason is probably various innovations, methods and ways used in reading training, as well as increasingly scarce communication within the family, i.e. premature and excessive exposure of children to various electronic devices. , which by their nature imply one-way communication - from the device to the child. This one-way communication is delaying speech and language development in children and speech and language development are the basis of reading and writing.

The question is, how to distinguish between an unmastered reading technique and dyslexia?

The unmastered reading technique is characterized by beginner, unsystematic errors. Dyslexics have a less rich typology of errors, more common in incidence, i.e., they repeat one type of error systematically.

Students' age is also one of the essential factors in differentiating dyslexia from an unmastered reading technique. In first and second grade students, we can assume that this is an unmastered reading technique, due to insufficient preparation for school, delays in physiological development, etc. If the student did not learn to read by the end of second grade, with all other favourable circumstances (stimulating family, regular school attendance, average abilities, no intellectual disability, and so on), we can conclude that the student has dyslexic disorders, and can start a more detailed evaluation and diagnosis.

The most reliable way of evaluation is continuous monitoring of students during the process of adopting reading techniques with the application of speech therapy diagnostics.

We live in an age of the internet and electronics, which are an integral part of our lives, and even the lives of our children. Pre-school children get acquainted with letters much earlier than 20-30 years ago, they get acquainted with the sound image of words, and many learn to read even before going to school. Such children enroll in school much more willing to begin training in reading and writing. However, not all children mature at the same rate, and not all have the same conditions and stimulating families. These children find it extremely difficult and are mostly less successful in the training of reading and writing in the 1st grade. In these children, in a way, one physiological period of their maturation has been skipped.

Our school system, with all the changes that have taken place in the last twenty years, still implies that all children mature and learn in the same way and at the same speed. It would be good to single out "advanced" students after enrolling in school and start working with them on improving reading and writing techniques, and at the same time for other students to learn to read and write slowly, systematically respecting their abilities and degree of maturity.

This selection of students would be possible if the elementary school program were extended from eight to nine years. In that case, the preschool program of the kinder-garten would become the first grade in primary school, during which work would be done exclusively on the development and encouragement of pre-intellectual functions in children, and their speech and language development, through a clearly structured and defined program.

Reading, and therefore writing, are fundamental skills that a child will use throughout his or her life. It is very important to lay a solid foundation and enable the child to master them, respecting the natural process of child maturation, which is not the same for everyone, while providing clearly defined, structured and guided support for each child.

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For the Love of… Grammar!

Inspired by Jakob Patekar's piece in the previous edition of HUPEzine, I wanted to follow up on this ever-present topic and possibly provide some more food for thought.

To start us off… I love grammar. I have always loved it, in all the languages I studied. I have a favourite tense in English (Future Perfect, in case you are wondering). I enjoy sentence transformations, diagramming, conditionals, and irregular plurals. I truly enjoyed translating texts from Latin to Croatian and vice versa when I studied Latin at school! Such good entertainment for my mind! Do I think everybody should **enjoy** such tasks? No. Do I think it is **crucial** for students to take part in such tasks? Again, no. Do I think primary level students **must be evaluated** on their performance in such grammar-based tasks (fitting to their level)? **Definitely a big fat no**.

Just to be clear, by no means do I think that having grammar knowledge is useless or futile. What I do believe, though, is that grammar *per se* is and should not be the goal. To echo Prof. Patekar highlights, we need to keep in mind that grammar is ONE of the thirteen elements of communicative competence, as outlined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume* – and we need to **be aware** of that **in theory and in practice**.

The teachers I have spoken with unanimously say that the goal of language learning is communication. And yet they regularly build their lessons around grammar points, unable to shake off the voice that keeps drilling, "You must teach this. How will they ever know if you don't teach it now?" Let us explore this voice together.

Love or need?

In February, I was honoured to take part in the first HUPE Day of 2021. As I was preparing the workshop, I thought it would make sense to ask teachers what is relevant for them and what will bring value. Interestingly, the two burning topics that emerged from my limited and informal polling were **motivation and grammar**. While I really wanted my workshop to focus on motivation and human connection, I still heard that nagging voice that I simply must include grammar at least for a bit, or my audience might not find the workshop valuable.

This got me thinking – have we been **conditioned to need** grammar? In the olden days, grammar was the queen. And even today, it somehow feels incomplete if we don't touch upon it in a lesson, doesn't it? But why is that still so?
- Grammar is **familiar** – for example, when you tell a colleague, "I covered Present Perfect today," they will know exactly what you mean. They will also likely know the very examples you used.
- Grammar is **straightforward** – for example, when you say to a colleague that your class is doing presentations, it is not readily transparent what exactly that entails. If you tell them your students are writing a test on the comparison of adjectives, your work is clear and measurable.

- Grammar is also **tangible** (and finite) – when you check "Conditionals" off your list, you have a mental image of how big a piece of the grammar cake you have just chewed off.

All in all, grammar is the comfort zone. It is a **reliable option** because it is pretty predictable. It also gives **a false sense** of "how much work I've done by covering all that grammar"… To clarify, I am not saying people who teach grammar are not doing the work – they most certainly are. But we must admit to ourselves that there is insufficient reciprocity between the work put into teaching and the long-lasting outcomes (I am referring to actual acquisition here; not an excellent grade on the test). On the one hand, you're putting effort into teaching grammar, possibly spending hours trying to make it interesting, looking for additional innovative resources and tasks. On the other hand, your students just do not care about it, as they do not see much personal value in it. Or they learn for the test, which is in itself demoralizing – but is really not the teachers' fault.

Don't get me wrong – been there, done that. I was there, doing this very same thing and sharing the same frustration. To add insult to injury, I was teaching English majors – so from my point of view, it was implied that they are motivated and interested and love the nuances of grammar. Guess what? Nope. I don't think I can accurately paint the picture of **my disappointment, sadness, and frustration** at the time. After all, I was doing it differently than I was taught - I moved away from the infamous Quirk and certainly did not expect my students to memorize definitions. In retrospect, my teaching was not really communicative, either, but I did my best to make my teaching interesting and engaging, and yet, many times, it simply did not work. And many times, it did – it very much depended on the group, but I wanted it to work for everyone.

And herein lies another issue you might be encountering as well – expecting everyone to care about what you want to (need to? have to?) teach them. In reality, **your students would rather**:
a) listen to a Premiership football commentary,
b) dance to Taylor Swift,
c) send each other funny gifs or memes,
d) read a comic book,
e) watch cartoons.

My references might be fairly outdated here, but you get the gist. And guess what? Your students would be getting **authentic target language input** through all these activities, including lexicon, grammar, and sociolinguistic cues.

So let me ask you this: **Whom does this unwavering dedication to grammar really serve?** Is it love or need? Do you teach grammar because you love it? Or do you need to teach grammar to show (to yourself, your students, their parents, your colleagues) that you are progressing through the set curriculum? These are likely not the only two possible answers… but it is a question worth asking and answering.

Dethroning grammar, not banning it!

What do we do with grammar, then? Well, we need to realize grammar is one of the players on our language team, but not THE key player. It is as important as other players (for example, lexicon, coherence, sociolinguistic appropriateness) - they all need to work together well. This means that grammar should not be getting special treatment, and it should not be the starting point when we choose the tasks, materials, and assessment.

In all honesty, I believe implicit knowledge of grammar is more than enough for many proficient users. Yes, knowing your grammar can add a layer of fanciness and pizzazz when you polish your speech or writing (such as finding the proper parallel structure to make your point or using inversion for emphasis effect). But you are far more likely to experience a communication breakdown if you use a wrong word than if you use a clumsy grammatical structure.

I would even argue that overt **language awareness** does not need to be pursued as a learning objective before high school. People can be perfectly capable of using a specific grammatical form properly without ever knowing its name, really. Just to solidify this point, let me give you a few personal, anecdotal examples:

- I studied Italian as a second foreign language in high school and mostly had As throughout the four years. Today I can tell you how to form *Passato Prossimo* and can also conjugate *essere* and *avere*. But I am unable to communicate in Italian, although I might understand an occasional phrase here and there and can make out the meaning of lyrics in popular *canzonas*.

- Spanish, on the other hand… I never studied it formally (apart from a one-semester course as an adult). I had been exposed to it through numerous telenovelas and songs. As kids, we used to re-enact the expressive, dramatic delivery of Mexican actors – we played with the language, the sounds, and the phrases. I am far more confident in my Spanish than I ever was in my Italian and have used it without shame or hesitation when visiting Spain.

- My 7-year-old daughter is multilingual – in addition to Croatian, she has been exposed to English since birth through books, songs, cartoons, and educational apps. During the past year and a half, she has also acquired Dutch at a near-native level. Lexically, she is probably slightly lagging due to lesser exposure, but her grammar is top-notch. She has never received any formal grammar instruction in Dutch. As for English, out of sheer curiosity, I recently gave her a task on reflexive pronouns, similar to the one from this year's school-level competition for 8th graders in Croatia. She had never heard of reflexive pronouns but was able to complete the task without any mistakes.

My bottom line here is: We learn better through exposure, mirroring, and experimentation. If we can agree that the goal of language learning is communication, I invite you now to **reflect on how much time or space you provide for communication in your classroom**.

If your mind automatically goes to all the reasons why you can't, all the obstacles in your way, I invite you to write those down. And if you have that list, those obstacles are real for you at this point in time. It is your current reality – but luckily, change is the one thing that is constant in life.

Supporting the paradigm shift through teacher empowerment

How do we take all this from the nominal "the goal of language learning is communication" to actually infusing the classrooms with communication opportunities? Maybe you can give some thought to these ideas:

1. Relax
The beautiful thing about learning is that it is iterative, not linear. So if you think about it, **it is not like you have a single shot** at teaching the students a particular language structure or a vocabulary item. Not all is lost if they don't get it while you are teaching it. They will surely reencounter it later, and you will help them build on their knowledge.

YOU are the professional in the field, and you know that sometimes some of us just need to take the scenic route to get to where we need to be.

2. Bring in authenticity
Think about what is front of mind for your students in their lives beyond the classroom. When they can recognize the connection between what is done in class and their own lives, classroom learning becomes more meaningful.

Instead of going for the one-size-fits-all approach, try to get to know your students. Let them be your springboard for the topics you bring in, and you can then layer those topics from a language learning point of view, moving them towards the set learning outcomes.

3. Allow for experimentation
Refocus from what they know about language to what they can do with the language. Allow the children to experiment with language. The teachers' part of the equation is to expose, illustrate, repeat, vary, and model. And the students repeat, internalize and then start experimenting.

Having opportunities to experiment with language can get them a step closer to developing the willingness to communicate freely out there in the real world. And that is the point of language learning.

4. Correct mindfully
A pretty difficult one – how about we refrain from correcting everything? Bear in mind that nobody can freely communicate if they are constantly being corrected. What happens more often than not is that students start to feel shame and lose confidence.

Be mindful of **when** and **how** you deliver corrections and make sure your students know that mistakes help us learn. Also, try to make sure your feedback is future-focused. Make it clear that not knowing something right now does not mean the person will never know it.

5. Own your teaching
You are not accountable to the textbook. Too often, we are burdened by thoughts like, "I have to cover this unit. I must go through these tasks or else…" You know where the students need to go (which outcomes need to be achieved), but there are multiple ways to reach the destination.

Trust your judgment. The textbook is just one of the teaching aids, and it is supposed to facilitate but not dictate what you do. Think about why you are doing a particular task or topic, how it contributes to the overall goals, and how it helps your students' progress. The same goes for assessment options. Once you know why you decided to implement option B instead of A or C, you (re)gain professional confidence.

6. Reach out
There is no shame in not knowing – what to do, how to start, whether you are on the right track. Let's depart from this mindset in which "not knowing" is something to be judged. If you would like to introduce changes to your work, feel free to look for support.

If, for whatever reason, you are reluctant to do so in your own immediate context, look beyond – in another school, another town, another county. You just might find a kindred spirit.

I would like to give a shoutout to Dora Božanić Malić and Mirta Kos Kolobarić, who presented their example of distant cooperation and inspiration during the HUPE Day in February.

7. Show TLC to grammar
To circle back (don't we just love this trendy phrase?): I love grammar. And if you do too, I invite you to identify what it is about grammar that you love. Remember, when you are doing it routinely, your students know it. Once you are clear on what you love, you just might become inspired on how to convey that sentiment to your students.

If there is one thing worth spreading in today's circumstances, I would go for spreading enthusiasm about the things we love, grammar included.

Finally…

It is fine if none of this resonates with you right now. In case you are getting defensive about what I wrote, that is also pretty normal. Change is really, really hard. If you do not feel like you could (or should) be changing anything, I still invite you to think about **why** you make the choices you make in your classroom.

Oh, and if you do wish to go back to that obstacle list you made, I suggest you rank the obstacles, determine which ones you can influence, and start there. Gaining clarity is always a good thing.

Davorka Bronzić
OŠ Župa dubrovačka

WHAT ABOUT US?
or
"If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life."

Let me tell you a story about a typical English teacher, a story about you and me. It starts when you are in your mid-twenties and this is on your to-do list: Find a job, start an internship, get married, have a baby, finish the internship, prepare your lessons, correct tests, reflect on your teaching, try to improve teaching in every possible way, do projects, design classroom materials, print, cut, copy, have another baby, clean the house, cook healthy meals for the family, take the kids to the park, the beach, football practice, try new teaching methods, never miss a professional development opportunity, plan, read, write, deliver. And the list goes on and on. Sounds familiar?

By the time I was thirty-five my thyroid gland refused to cooperate. I started hormone therapy and continued with my to-do list.

Except my list got even longer because in my mid-thirties I decided to add a few more items to it: Improve my teaching skills, even more, start teacher training, deliver workshops, start mentoring, travel, take up a hobby, raising teenage boys, learn how to use all kinds of digital tools in the classroom, (did I mention teenage boys?), laugh and cry with my students, deal with the unrealistic wants and desires of their parents, try to bring structure to our poorly structured educational system, making sure that I always do my best in every single aspect of my life while completely ignoring the signals my body is sending me.

And then, one morning I woke up in pain, I couldn`t get up, I couldn`t walk. From that moment until the day I was diagnosed, it was a full three years, three years of doctor visits, hospitals, therapies that did not help. I was even told it was all in my head and that it was "just stress" because no one knew how to help me.

In 2018 I was finally diagnosed with *ankylosing spondylitis (AS), a rare type of arthritis that causes pain and stiffness in the body. This lifelong, autoimmune, inflammatory disease has no cure. In a very short period, I went from being a very active person to a person with a disability, and this change greatly impacted both my personal and professional life. I became a person with special needs.

But why am I telling you all this? Why I am sharing my personal story?

Teaching is still very much a female profession in Croatia and **although women are healthier, live longer than men, and are less susceptible to infectious diseases, on the other hand, 80% of people with autoimmune diseases are women. These diseases affect 5-10% of the population and are often chronic.

***If we buy into the possibility, confirmed in recent studies, that stress is the trigger for most autoimmune diseases, it is easy to do the math.

What we teachers think is a normal amount of stress is not normal, but a sure path to various conditions and illnesses. Unfortunately, the situation is likely to be worse after the Covid19 pandemic and online school.

In our society being a teacher means coming to terms with the fact that it's hard, and that, unfortunately, is also a message that is sent to us by our superiors, so that over the years, instead of an effective support system, we are only saddled with more and more work.

But what about those colleagues who find it harder than others - what
about them? What about us?

Recently, a lot of attention has been paid to students with special needs, while teachers with special needs are barely mentioned.

As a teacher with disabilities who have struggled with difficulties both in the workplace and in my personal life for many years, here's what I have learned:

1.Express your needs clearly! Don't embrace the difficulties of the job with a smile, regardless of what all the motivational quotes and posters say.
Properly articulate your feelings, thoughts, and needs to your superiors.
Whether you need to adjust the room, furniture, work hours, or use the
elevator, just ask, or write it down.

2. **Don't be afraid to say NO!** If there are no more long meetings, sessions, trips, and outings (tasks that are beyond your mental and physical capabilities) for you, it's okay to say no. You shouldn't feel guilty about the things you can't do. There are still plenty of things you are good at, focus on those.

3. **Think like a professional!** Disability is not an inability. Being disabled doesn't mean you can become lazy, shal-

low, and give bad lessons. It may be more
difficult for you than for other colleagues, but the quality of your teaching must remain at the level of professionalism (a job well done).

4. **Be honest with your students!** I explain to my students what my
difficulties are and they always understand, accept, and offer their help.

5. **Try to enjoy!** Focus on the things you enjoy doing. For me, that's projects, collaborating with colleagues, exploring new methods and ways of teaching, having coffee with my fellow teachers, having a laugh... (and, of course, HUPE conferences).

6. **Value your time!** This is the most difficult task for me, and I am still learning how to separate these two lives (if you have any good advice, please let me know). Although I manage to physically separate myself from my desk and my laptop, my mind is still full of teaching. But now I know that it's not necessary to work more or work all the time to be a good teacher. I try to manage my time effectively and find time in my schedule for the things that matter.

To sum up, new demands that make this tough job even harder for all of us especially affect teachers with special needs and disabilities. There is a need to talk and hear about this issue within the system, which is certainly under-investing in the health and well-being of its staff.

If you have a colleague with special needs, be kind and helpful to them, but please, also be kind to yourself and take care of your health.

*   https://www.webmd.com/ankylosing-spondylitis/
       what-is-ankylosing-spondylitis
**   https://tidsskriftet.no/en/2017/06/kronikk/
       why-are-autoimmune-diseases-more-preva-
       lent-women
*** https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/au-
       toimmune-disease-and-stress-is-there-a-
       link-2018071114230#:~:text=A%20new%20
       study%20has%20raised,diagnosed%20with%20
       stress%2Drelated%20disorders.

Maja Labaš Horvat
Srednja Škola Prelog

WORK HARD TO SURVIVE

Although some will find the title pathetic, if you are one of those lucky ones working in a small, vocational school in a small town, I am sure that you can identify with me. Every school year is one giant promotion to attract the students from the county and the battle never ends. You all know how we teachers have three months of fun and entertainment during summer, but I know that those two or three days when you don't really think about next school year, lesson plans and events you need to organise are really long and boring.

When in July we finally find out that we will be here next year, planning and preparing for the European day of languages begins by contacting the national representative in order to receive a goody bag for participants in the numerous activities which you plan on the beach or somewhere in the shade. It needs to be done early enough or bracelets and pencils will be taken and you will be left with posters or stickers which students don't really appreciate. Then, when you are finally back at school, you can start the actual work. When it comes to celebrating EDL in my school, we try to be very creative so we prepare talks, exhibitions, quizzes and workshops for the local kindergarten, primary school and our students. Our guests come to visit the school or we organize events for the public, but it is always fun and entertaining.

In September our school organises a project week where we promote vocational programmes so, I try to surprise the students and our guests with workshops about media literacy, live-action role-playing workshops (we were cowboys in a saloon trying to find a murderer and had a blast while doing that) or the ones where students write a mock job application and a CV and go through a real job interview.

If we are lucky enough and have been selected to take part in the Juvenes translators competition, we take out the dictionaries and do our best to represent our school in this famous European translating competition and we had the privilege to be a part of the competition for three times and the students did translations from English and German into Croatian. This year we had competitors in school and online, but they all did a great job!

You feel like you have just started working and Christmas preparations begin. Our cooks and bakers run wild and the school is transformed into a huge baking factory so it is difficult to end the year without some extra pounds, but this isn't the only thing happening. Our school has a special Christmas school extravaganza where the best singers, actors, dancers and performers of all kinds entertain the entire school and get us all in the Christmas mood. So if you are lucky, like me, to be an English and Croatian teacher, you will want to take part in preparing the students for this event and won't have time for anything else. During English classes, we try to be creative and in a festive mood so we prepare our special Christmas edition of an online newspaper with humorous stories connected to this special time of the year.
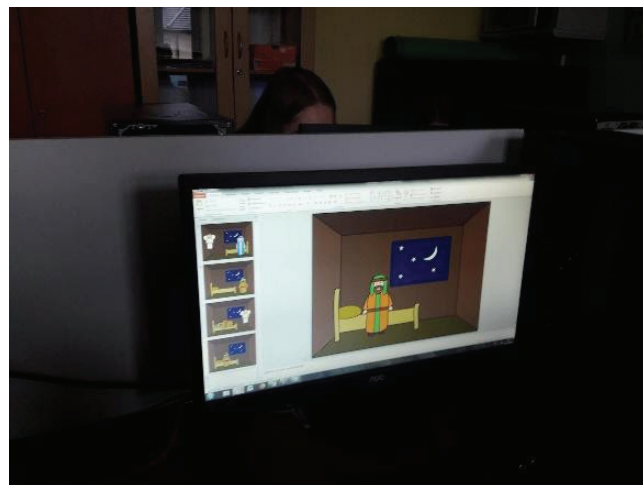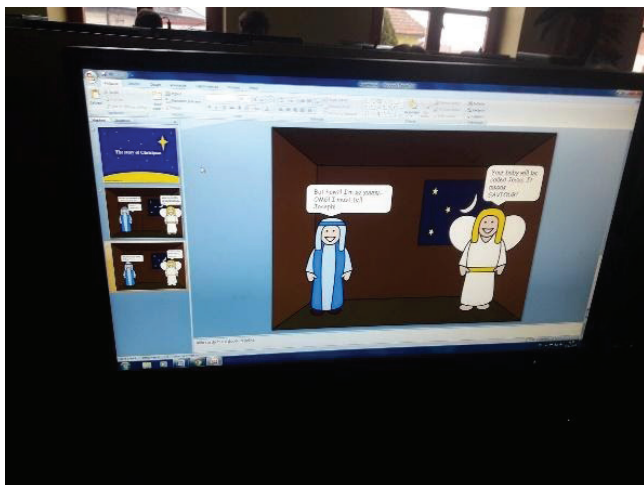
When we get back to school in January, preparations for numerous competitions begin and we waste no time because our students love to take part in them and are very successful. Although I teach English, I also participated in LiDraNo in the past and for 18 years I have been a GLOBE teacher and I have mentored students who have taken part in the national GLOBE competition for the last 16 years, so competition time never ends for me.


Somewhere in between the regional and national competitions, we celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, World poetry day and The International English language day. We write our own poetry, wear green, eat green food and show how much we know about the Irish culture, organise pub quizzes for students and have various workshops about the English language.

The Best in English is an international competition which our students love, so the school participates in it every year. It is especially appreciated by the seniors because they see it as preparation for the State Matura Exam because of the excellent reading and listening comprehension assignments. During the Days of Media Literacy, we create our newspapers with real and fake news, talk about media literacy and learn about our digital traces.
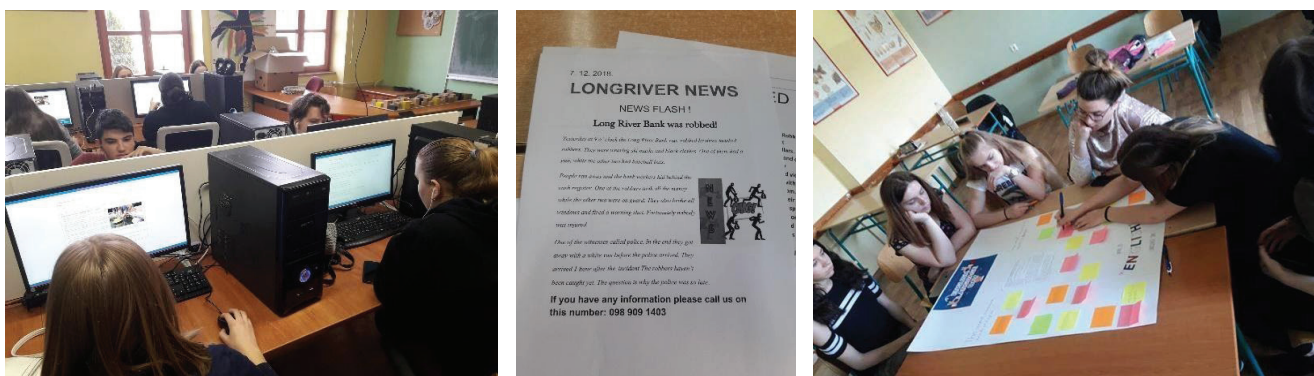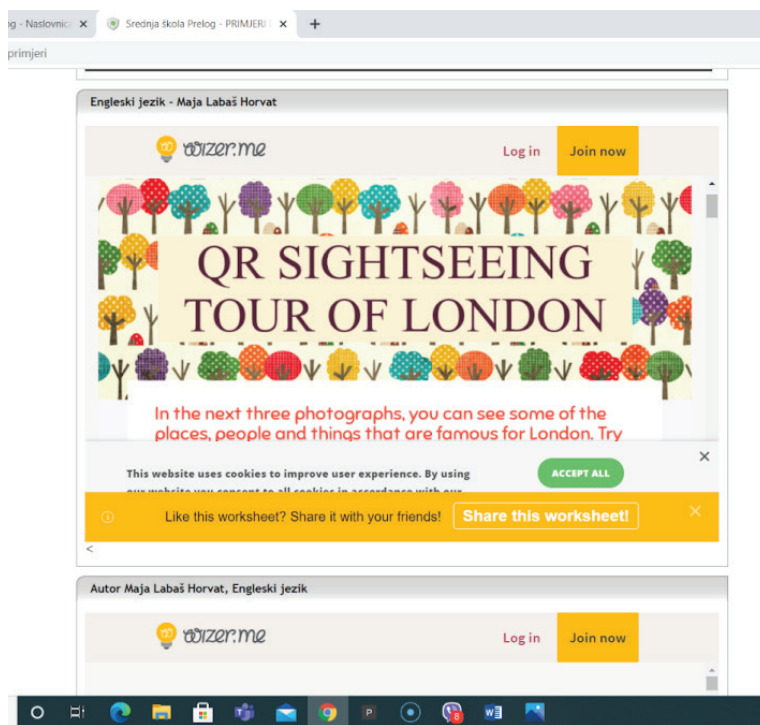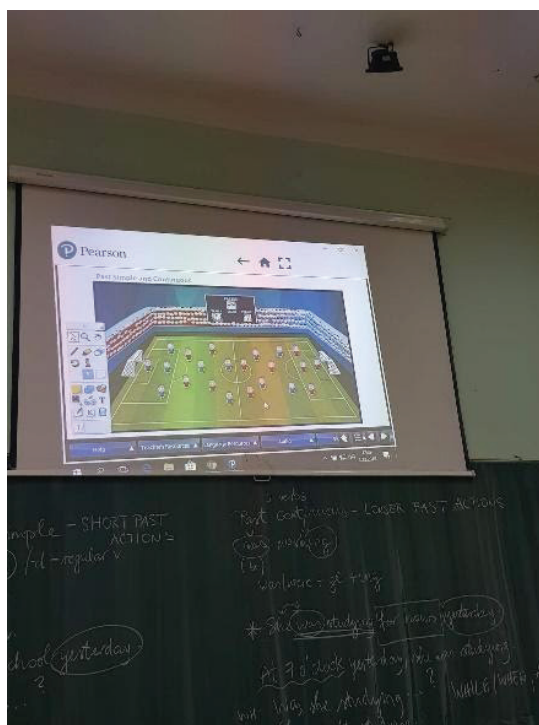

In order to keep in touch with the world, we joined a BBC project called Live Classes, so every year we take part in Skype classes with an English teacher from Britain and students from secondary schools around the world. We had the privilege to discuss tourism, higher education and sustainable development with young people from Poland, Iran, Slovakia and India.
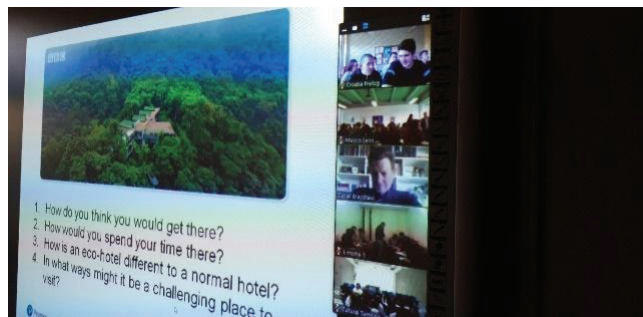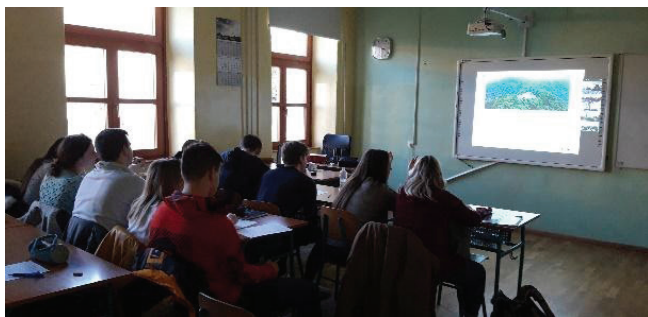
May is especially busy and full of activities and events because we host Gastromanija, a public event where we try to include our students, primary school students and the local community. It is a cooking contest, but it is also a chance to present our school to the public. Again we prepare various workshops and entertaining activities for children and adults. It is great fun and the best way to get sunburnt at the beginning of May.

You would think that all of this would be enough to attract students to our school, but the principal does not agree with that and we organize a ''Come and meet the school and the staff day''. This is when we all run around the school with eighth-graders and their parents and introduce the staff and different school activities showing them what we have to offer for their future education and life.

In the years before the pandemic, my students visited primary school Prelog at the end of May and were the teachers in their English classes for one day. They talked about the culture of various English speaking countries with their friends of whom many have become our students and have continued the tradition of visiting their former school, teachers and friends.

In order not to get lazy during those days when we are not organizing something, we all try to make learning as engaging as possible, so we learn with the help of technology and the media, and even the most boring lessons turn out great.

And then, when the last school bell rings, you start to feel excited about the new generation which is coming in September and cannot wait to see them in your classroom, in your projects, events and life for the next three or four years.

Marijana Mikulandra, English and Italian teacher
OŠ Tina Ujevića, Trg Andrije Hebranga 11, Šibenik

WHAT DO VIDEO LESSONS AND COOKIES HAVE IN COMMON?

Do you use video lessons in distance teaching?

Why video lessons? Obviously, they are multisensory and more interactive than just written instructions. Secondly, they are inclusive. In terms of younger learners, we must have in mind that a certain number of them are still poor readers. If we are talking about secondary students, there is always a steady number of them who don't follow synchronous online lessons for this or that reason, not arguing what the reasons might be, they just are, right there.

Why my own video lessons when there are professional ones? Because your videos include one extremely important element of learning: socio-emotional one. Believe it or not, your students like to hear your voice! They might not like it in the classroom, but when it comes to distance learning your voice most certainly bridges the gap between you and your learners.
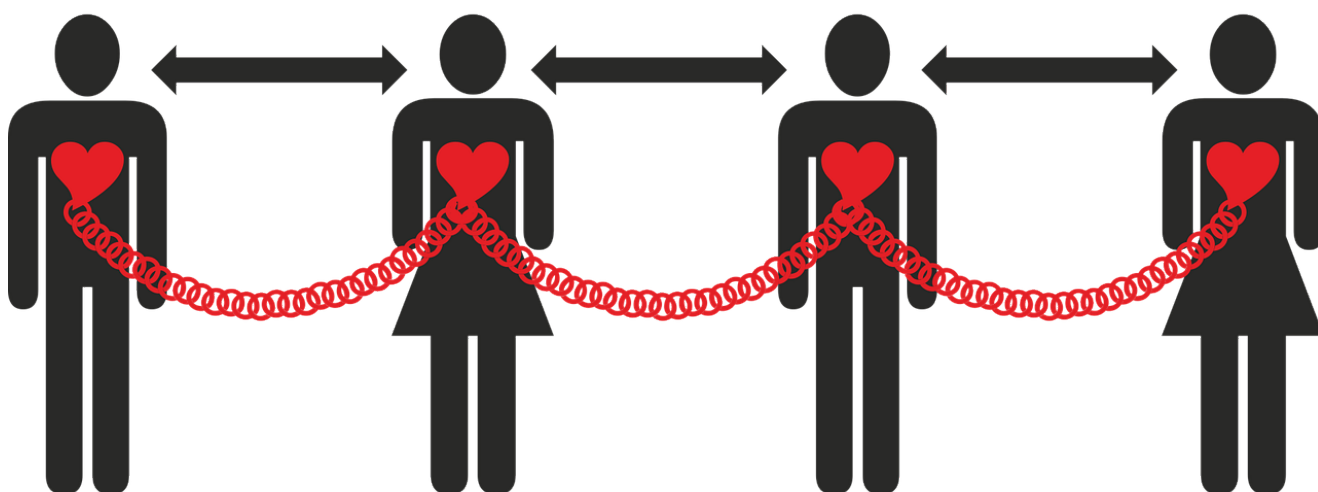
Picture: Pixabay

I used to use other people's lessons for my pupils (and I still do because they are well structured and paced and methodically polished) but the moment I put my first video lessons, raw and bumpy, filmed in one take, without editing, in each of my 8 ''classrooms'' I stared at my students' instant feedbacks: ''Teacher, we like to hear your voice. It's just like we're in the classroom. Thank you!'' What puzzled me even more; I got the same feedback from the students who had been hard to reach, until then. There was no doubt, I had to go on with that.

Now, a year older and wiser, I still make them and believe in them. And combine them with those polished ones. I still make them in the old-fashioned way, with the same old Free FlashBack Express Recorder but I've learnt how to manage time better, choose the most appropriate activities, change dynamics and include self-reflection. I've learnt their multifunctionality: sometimes it's a video per lesson unit, sometimes a PowerPoint presentation filmed with my voiceover, next time it's a short video preceding a video call (flipped classroom), or a motivational introduction at the beginning of our Meet, the other time it's a tutorial for creating a digital poster or Forms quiz. And you don't have to turn on your camera or sign up to YouTube! You can put it directly onto Teams or share it as your Google Drive link.

Are my video lessons perfect? Not at all.
I like to use the "two cakes" analogy when I talk about my video lessons.

Photos: Pixabay

On the left, there is a Michelin star dessert. It's prepared technically perfect, it's colourful, there's definitely at least one if not more ingredients I don't have in the fridge, and it's probably delicious, not that I have ever consumed one.

On the right, there are, what I call, Grandma's Cookies. They're made according to your grandma's recipe, the old one, you know. And they haven't turned out well. They're dry, a little bit overbaked, with too much or less of something, there is no acacia honey in them, or mango purée, just lots of white sugar and flour, maybe a pinch of salt. They're painfully plain, rustical and you can't find a single same-size pair of them. But they smell goooooood. That warm, familiar smell takes you to well-known places and times, awakens your memories and makes you feel safe and relaxed. And they don't taste bad at all. You'll eat them all eventually.

So why not get down to baking!

With time, you'll learn how to regulate the oven temperature, feel the batter, maybe you'll add some cocoa powder or coconut flour next time if you feel adventurous. And then, one day, just like that, someone will ask you the recipe.

Photo: Pixabay

Suzana Mihelčić
Osnovna škola Vinica, Marčan

Role-playing: Teachers as psychologists

There is nothing more beautiful in a teacher's working day than meeting smiling students preferably live in classrooms. After I, as enthusiastic as I am, returned from "the holidays" called *distant learning,* back into my classroom with a bunch of new or old and almost forgotten activities, I came across some obstacles in my work environment that have bombarded my lessons and bothered me over the past months. When a teacher acts as a psychologist, he comes across various solutions in situations that have troubled me lately, although they have been present even before the time of the pandemic.

Mindfulness

One has a superpower of being fully present, being aware of where we are now and of what we are doing. The technique is focused on attention, the perception of people and things around us as well as feelings within us. We often work with students who do not know how to focus their attention on the important parts of a lesson – focusing on teaching, paying direct attention and *being present*. We tend to forget that children have also been stressed out especially during the last year. School obligations have increased and students are asked to be fast and adaptable. Teachers understand them. At least we try. The result is inappropriate behaviour especially seen in the lower grades. Children become aggressive and/or emotionally unstable and more introverted.

By mastering the basic techniques of becoming aware of their behaviour and acting properly, students get to know themselves better and try to control their behaviour. It is desirable for them to recognize the restlessness in themselves and take time-outs in the middle of the lessons. Students' self-control is an important little helper for us teachers with the aim of saving energy and redirecting it towards studying. The more students can balance their behavioural themselves, the less need for managing classroom conflicts for teachers. I've started performing the morning round of activities again with younger students primarily the ones lacking emotional control. The learning outcomes are achieved and students somehow start the lesson more peacefully.

Oh empathy, where have you gone?

Children should adopt this skill at an early age within a family while teachers should continue to nurture it in school. My heart tightens while at the same time I freak out seeing students being unable to activate their empathy. Instead of being compassionate they laugh and tease. Those are the times I think of my two-year-old son who runs towards a crying child and comforts his kindergarten buddy with those soft little hands and soothing words. I am a type of teacher who, when she notices the lack of empathy in the classroom, uses class activities which encourage empathy among students. I love the activity '*Tap someone on the shoulder who…*'. It often fits well into my lessons as I try to achieve the learning outcomes and encourage students' empathy. Students usually like the activity while I am pleased because of trying to reach them.

Teaching resistance

Teachers must be super adaptable. After I've finished teaching my 1st graders I hop into the 8th grade. For me personally, it is an emotional shock even after so many years of working experience. I hope you agree with me that the new generations of students are quite challenging. Only 5 years ago my 3rd graders were looking forward to singing nursery rhymes in comparison with my current 3rd grade who already admire YouTube performers and influencers. Yes, we are flexible. That's the only way we could survive and do the job we are paid for. We often witness weeping, grumbling, and righteous students without being able to balance their emotions. If they entered our schools with prior knowledge of self-control, it would teach them a B isn't a bad mark. Just thinking about getting less than an A makes some shed tears. A student of mine is constantly angry at himself because of not being able to solve the task and come up with the correct solution. Of course, he regularly refuses to take part in class activities. Who should have taught him to form his own mindset and develop resilience? Students should strive for progress in the battle called *the better me*, but not by having the pleasure of getting straight A's.

Tea Horvatić
Osnovna škola Strahoninec

Using Minecraft in the Classroom

Minecraft in Education is a powerful game you can use in the classroom to motivate students and empower their learning. By using simple assessment tools such as student portfolio, camera, and book and quill students can record their learning throughout the game.

Students of Primary School Strahoninec created a world of a Christmas village where they made sculptures, buildings, and put up posters, slates and boards to create an exhibition of their work. The task was part of an international competition where students competed to show their creativity, resourcefulness and showed their abilities of cooperation and creating in Minecraft as a class. You can see the short video presentation here: https://youtu.be/kpiLDQK-SPg

In Minecraft Education Edition, a game specifically created for schools, students and teachers, you can create the worlds, join ready-made worlds from the Library or Lessons of the Month. They can play the game individually on a template you set or collaboratively by using the multi-player settings.

Starting points

Setting up the game is quite easy – all you need is a computer with an internet connection and minimum requirements which you can see at the following website: https://education.minecraft.net/get-started/download .

Once you have downloaded the game, you can sign in by using your @skole.hr username and password. It is free for all educators and their students. However, some people have had trouble joining in because there was a licencing problem. In such case, you should contact your administrator (Carnet helpdesk) to sort it out.

If you haven't tried playing Minecraft before, do not worry! There are tutorials for absolute beginners which you can use to get yourself familiar with the game and try the basic commands. Once all the students have Minecraft on their computers let them lead the way and let them teach you the rest. You will be amazed at how much you can learn from them. Here is a list of my favourite worlds and some tips on how you can use it in your lessons.

Lessons you can use

There are various subject kits you can choose from such as language arts, science, history and culture, computer science, math, and art and design. All of these can be used in English lessons, especially by connecting with cross-curricular topics.

For younger learners, you can use the lesson "Story Time" where students can experience famous stories such as Three Little Pigs, Hansel and Gretel or Jack and the Bean-

stalk and experience an English lesson in another way, immersed in Minecraft. There are lesson plans available on Minecraft community website.

Fifth or sixth graders can use a lesson made by Cambridge "Adventures in English" where they can practise using adjectives, comparison, numbers, and answering questions in a specially designed world.

If you like teaching about sustainable development you can use a lesson "City of the Future" where students can design their city of the future, taking into consideration the UN's sustainable development goals. Another great example is "Radical Recycling" lesson where students learn about ecology and how the recycling centre works.

Conclusion

In the beginning, it was quite challenging to start playing Minecraft but once you get the hang of it and realise how the worlds work, you can get plenty of inspiration to integrate Minecraft as part of your English lessons. I encourage you to try learning and exploring more about Minecraft and challenge yourself to try something new, but already familiar to your students, that will boost their motivation, creativity, sense of collaboration, as well as practising English skills in a fun way.

Resources:

Minecraft website: https://education.minecraft.net/
Tutorials: https://education.minecraft.net/class-resources/trainings