

ASOCIACION EX ALUMNOS DEL PROFESORADO EN LENGUAS VIVAS "J.R.FERNANDEZ"
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Teachers' Centre

AEXALEVI *Forum*

Issue V - May 2010

Dear teachers,

*It has now been a year since we began producing the **AEXALEVI Forum**. Having weathered the storms that beset every new undertaking and thanks to the heroic efforts of Myrian and Florencia we are now beginning to enjoy the rewards of our adventure.*

*Because the **AEXALEVI Forum** offers updated information and thought-provoking ideas.*

Because it discusses in depth down-to-earth points of interest that inspire teachers to use their talents and engage in stimulating, realistic activities.

Because it is really gratifying to have embarked on a project so closely related to our teaching profession.

Once again, thank you for your support and understanding.

With my best wishes.

Prof. Marta Moure

AEXALEVI *Forum*

Directed by
Prof. Marta Moure

Edited and Designed by
Prof Myrian Casamassima & Prof. Florencia Insúa

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C o n t e n t s

The State of the Art: Where we are and where we are going	3
Prof. Myrian Casamassima suggests how to address these issues in English Language Teaching.	
Voices from the Experts.....	5
An Interview to Prof. Liliana Luna, MA. in which she talks about her views on language teaching and learning and the importance of professional development.	
Insights into Language.....	7
Prof. Beatriz Petrucelli writes about her experience with phrasal verbs and how the new generations of students learn them. "Phrasal verbs are driving me crazy"	
Ideas Worth Sharing.....	11
Prof. Magdalena Barañao writes about ways of reaching harmony and wellbeing in class through a variety of techniques. "Unusual stuff for teachers"	
Guest Writer.....	14
Prof. Alba Pantanali writes about how to deal with students with some problems in language learning. "Some tips to improve the Progress of Students with Problems in English Learning."	
Activities on the Go!.....	16
Prof. Florencia Insua suggests an activity to help build the writing habit in children. "Inventing a World"	

The State of the Art: Where we are and where we are going.

Prof. Myrian Casamassima, M.A.

That methodologies come in and out of fashion is something we are all familiar with. The focus of attention in English Language Teaching shifts from this to that and then trends fade away. There are, however, approaches that have lingered on. Take Communicative Language Teaching as an example. It has managed to survive over several decades, but what is the state of the art?

Burke's pentad

I would like to suggest a close look at Burke's pentad. Five elements at constant interplay. Where is the boundary, one wonders, between the tools we use to learn (the agency in the pentad) and the context? Can context and language be separated from each other? Can technology drift apart from culture? What I can do as an agent in the learning process largely relies on the tools I use. The same thing can be said of the learners. So where are the boundaries between agents and agency? Agency and purpose. Purpose and context. We could go on combining elements and trying to draw the line.



Burke's pentad: AGENT (teacher and learners), ACT (learning), SCENE (context, where and when we learn), AGENCY (the tools we use), PURPOSE (purpose for learning). Burke's pentad is discussed in between them, and we would not be able to. All five elements are tightly interwoven. Burke's pentad shows us a

way of thinking about the learning process. Let us now apply it to English Language Teaching and Learning.

No single entities

Over the years I have found that we tend to oversimplify the issue of what a methodology is. I am using here the term “methodology” in a broad sense to encompass methods and approaches. I mentioned Communicative Language Teaching before. Let us take it up. Why has it survived for so long? Because it is not just one entity. And that is where we go oversimplistic. Communicative Language Teaching has defined and redefined itself and we can resort to Burke’s pentad to understand the development of several versions of a single methodology, this one or others. Task-based Learning is not just one methodology either. And I like to think of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the content-based end of the Task-based continuum. In a few words, the interplay of Burke’s elements gives birth to versions of what we generally believe to be a single methodology.

In our *Forum* at aexalevi.org.ar, you will find useful links related to the workshop about this topic given by Prof. Myrian Casamassima and Prof. Florencia Insua in the Anniversary of the Teachers’ Centre on April 23.

What is the state of the art?

Just look around. We keep importing methodologies that have been thought of for contexts other than ours. We are overridden by the advance of technology. So much so that we already have a term to name it: Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). And in the mist of all this, we continue hanging on to Communicative Language Teaching.

We started our discussion by referring to Burke’s pentad because I believe that the answer to our question lies there. As new conceptions, procedures, and resources are finding their way into our everyday teaching, we need to take a stand and reconsider ourselves as teachers and learners in relation to all this. This redefinition will definitely have a ripple effect over all the other elements. It could not be otherwise. Methodologies are not dogmas; they are not absolute. They need the critical eye of the teacher and the flexibility for redefinition in the light of our agents, context, agency, act and purpose. There lies the challenge towards which we are going.

Voices from the experts

An interview to Prof. Liliana Luna, M.A.

**Head of *Departamento de Alumnos Regulares*
at the Asociación**

The Teachers' Centre is fully committed to Teacher Development. We thought of interviewing someone who could give us her insight into this topic, someone with a long experience in working with several generations of teachers and with a career in the English Language Teaching profession. Liliana certainly qualifies.

How has the teaching of English changed over the last decades?

Methodologically speaking we have witnessed the great impact that Communicative Language Teaching has had by focussing on the importance of language functions rather than focussing only on grammar and vocabulary. Humanistic teaching has also influenced our teaching procedures and activities; classrooms have become student centred, i.e. teachers try to involve students by encouraging them to express their thoughts and feelings and by endeavouring to make students feel good. Another important issue is the idea that it is our duty as teachers to help our students become autonomous learners. Last but not least, computers and, of course, the Internet offer a

wealth of knowledge, information, materials and contacts that we can use to our advantage.

How important is it for a teacher to continue learning about teaching?

That is what we call Teacher Development. I think TD is vital, not only for our students' sake but for our own sake. Teachers who take an interest in self development become better teachers, and more importantly, they become happier teachers because they are able to keep excited about their jobs.

How relevant has teacher development been for your career?

It has been very important. I have always endeavoured to keep up to date

with new developments by reading books, articles, journals, by attending courses and workshops. I have also learnt a lot from colleagues, older and younger. I strongly believe we are constantly learning from all the people we interact with. I must also say that doing my MA in Education and Professional Development transformed my professional life.

How do you feel about online teacher development?

The first time I did an on-line course I must confess I had lots of misgivings. However, I immediately took to it. I really found very little difference between the “real” and the virtual classrooms. In fact, I liked interaction through the forum very much. Ideas and opinions were there in black and white for us to ponder on and reply to or contribute another opinion whenever possible. There was more time to reflect on the topics in question. I think on-line TD is the solution for many overworked teachers who cannot possibly engage in other types of TD activities.

What are language learning and teaching going to be like in the ten years' time?

I suppose in ten years' time we will still be working in a classroom with a group

of students. I hope we will all have interactive boards and materials. I think there will be a lot more interaction via e-mail among teachers and students. I can also envisage many more people taking online courses and attending institutes just to develop the speaking skill and to clarify doubts.

Insights into language

Phrasal verbs are driving me crazy!

Prof. Beatriz Petrucelli

Former Head of the Asociación, Beatriz is a *Lenguas Vivas* graduate and she has been a teacher here for about thirty years. She has vast experience in teaching advanced courses and is popular among students because of her success at teaching teenagers.

Students of English at different levels of the learning process are always complaining about phrasal verbs. They say these multi-word verbs drive them crazy. They argue, and it's quite understandable I guess, there are so many phrasal verbs that it is impossible to commit all of them to memory. They see that their attempts to remember the whole lot are utterly fruitless. And they are dead right!

How many phrasal verbs?

The Cambridge Phrasal Verb dictionary is 432 pages long! I haven't dared to count every single entry but some people claim there are approximately 2686 phrasal verbs in all. Can any student of English possibly dream of remembering so many words? Have

we, teachers, ever mastered the topic successfully?

Surely the answer to both questions is NO.

I can't speak for other teachers of English but I personally wouldn't expect my students to learn loads of phrasal verbs in the courses I give.

Having said that, I reckon that native speakers of the English language use

them all the time, since phrasal verbs are an important and spicy ingredient in their daily conversations. So teachers and students cannot “escape” from teaching and learning phrasal verbs, otherwise they will sound formalish when making conversation.

My own experience with phrasal verbs

I remember sitting for my Language I final exam in 1976. My teacher, my beloved teacher, was the late Miss Mora Pezzutti, who, together with Miss Passeron, was one of my heroes during my course of studies. When my oral exam was over, Miss Pezzutti approached me to tell me the mark and, after having learnt I had passed with flying colours, I proudly told her that I had spent weeks on end studying 900 phrasal verbs from the latest edition of the Thomson and Martinet Practical English Grammar. She looked at me in amazement and said (I can still hear her impeccable English) “What on earth did you do that for, Beatriz? You won’t ever be able to remember all of them!” I remained there, gaping at her, not being able to understand what she meant at the time. I was a good student of English. I was going to master the whole list of “phrasals” even if my life depended on it.

I couldn’t have been more wrong. And only now can I see why.

We aren’t speakers of English as a second language. We teach and study English as a foreign language. We aren’t exposed to the language as much as we would like to.

Generations of students

Of course, the cultural gap between 1976 and 2010 is significant. There’s a huge difference between the context students in the 70’s and 80’s studied English in and that of our current learners. Students are so very much exposed to the language nowadays that they learn phrasal verbs just “by osmosis”, either by watching the popular series “Friends” or “The Simpsons” on television, that is, simply by being in contact with native speakers on the screen, as it were. We also have the Internet and its wide spectrum of opportunities that range from the “YouTube” page to the songs, films and lyrics you can download by simply installing a program on your PC. The list of opportunities to be in touch with the language is endless, just as long as a complete list of phrasal verbs in a grammar book.

Unfortunately, however, there isn’t an easy way to learn phrasal verbs

formally. It takes a lot of reading, contextual exercises, definitions, synonyms and, why not, some repetition to eventually be able to use them spontaneously. If you ask your students to commit lists to memory, the whole thing can turn out to be quite boring and difficult for them, especially considering that nowadays students are not much used to studying the old fashioned way, if you know what I mean.

Take the phrasal verb with MAKE for instance. This one doesn't pose such a threat to students since it has relatively few entries and it is, no doubt, one of the most popular phrasal verbs in the English language but take a look at the following list:

Make after [Make after somebody].- (insep) When you make after somebody or an animal, you chase them.

- They made after him but couldn't catch him.
- The dog made after the cat but it managed to escape by climbing a tree.

Make away.- (insep) When criminals make away, they escape.

- They managed to make away after all.

Make away with [Make away with something].- (insep) (jewels, money) When criminals make away with something, they steal it and take it away.

- They made away with the stolen jewels.

Make for.- 1 (insep) When you make for a place, you move towards a place, usu. in a hurry.

- They made for the door.
- He made for the toilet as soon as we got home.

2 (insep) When something makes for something else, it produces or contributes to it in some way.

- The minister's speech makes for greater optimism.
- His constant lies don't make for a good relationship.
- His brilliant explanation makes for a better understanding of the whole issue.

Make into [Make into something].- When you make something into something else, you change it into something else.

- The idea is to make the building into flats.

Make off.- (insep) When you make off, you leave a place in a hurry.

- Overpowering the guard, the thief made off with the money and the guard's gun.

Make out.- (insep) When you make out something, you pretend something is true.

- He made out he was an expert in the field but it was clear he didn't know what he was talking about.

Make out [Make something out].- 1
When you make something out, you manage to understand or see it.

- I couldn't quite make out the writing on the package.

2 (cheque, bill, tax return, shopping list)
When you make something out, you write or complete it.

- Please make out the cheque to CMM Intelligence Ltd.

Make up [Make something up].- When you make something up, you invent it.

- The story she told you wasn't true. She just made it up.

Hard to remember, isn't it so?

To my mind, one of the best ways for students to remember these items of vocabulary is by asking them to make sentences, either orally, written or both, based on their daily experiences. When they can relate some vocabulary or structures to their own lives, they tend to remember the words in question far more easily. I have been doing this in class for quite a long time and, believe me, it has paid off ,.....which reminds me.....I have to have a look at the phrasal verb with Pay, since I feel some of the combinations have slipped my mind.

Oh, my!

Ideas worth sharing

Unusual stuff for teachers

Prof. Magdalena Baraña

Magdalena has been an English teacher for twenty-two years. She teaches primary and secondary level students. She holds a degree on IT for Educational Purposes and has also been an applicant for “Tecnologías de la Comunicación Educativa” (Universidad CAECE). Since 2007, Magdalena has become a Reiki practitioner and Master in different Reiki branches.

When asked to write an article for this newsletter issue, I was determined to write about technology and its multiple uses in our classroom. But then I started reflecting on the importance of harmony and wellbeing in class, without which nothing can be done even if we have the best and most modern devices to work with.

In general we are almost never aware of the need to feel better, be better and manage a harmonious class. We , teachers are running from one job to another, correcting heaps of papers , marking tests, designing material for our classes but we do forget about us,

about how to connect with the inner part in each of us.

You may say I might be crazy for saying this. And perhaps you are right. But let's be honest, how often do we think of ourselves in connection to the class? Do we consider our well being as part of our lessons? As a rule of thumb we were trained to think about the students' needs more than in our needs. But shouldn't we do something to change this?

As you may well know, there has been a great development of the “complementary and alternative therapies” such as meditation, tai chi, yoga, reiki, balancing, aura soma and

floral therapy to mention just a few. Perhaps some of us have been attending some yoga lessons to relax and regain energy and master concentration for some time now. So don't freak out if I tell you that all these techniques can also be done in class and of course obtain marvellous results.

I have been using some visualization and breathing exercises in class to help students (and myself of course!) relax and prevent them from increasing their aggressive nature at times.

Every Friday I devote some minutes to what they call "Yoga Session". When I started doing this in class, it seemed I was dropping seeds in a desert, it was something futile.

Nevertheless, I was not discouraged and continued with my master plan. Little by little I introduced relaxation music as background noise while working in class. I even played some mantras. It was very funny to see the reaction the music had on my students (7th graders). I remember one of the girls asking me to bring a song she liked a lot "Ong Namo" sung by Deva Premal. Although the words are in Sanskrit, the students were able to understand it and wanted some more of that "woman who sings very weird songs" Of course, this connection with the words and music was not done in a conscious level as a mantra works at different levels in our soul.

As I said before, it took some time to get students used to this kind of activities but after a couple of years of trying them out, I must say it is worth doing it. We feel better and our students are better to. Wouldn't that be a big reward for us?

Don't panic. You don't need to be a Lama or Guru to introduce these practises in class. Let me show you something very simple you can apply in you and your students.

A) You can introduce the 5 principles of Reiki

Just for today

Don't get angry

Don't worry

Be grateful

Work hard

Be kind to others.

(Repeat each of them three times in soft voice hands in gassho position: as if praying)

This could be a great exercise to go over commands, class management, etc.

B) Work on breathing exercises.

Ask students to breathe in, in 4 times sending the air to the lowest part of their bodies (below de solar plexus : belly) making sure there is no tension in their bodies or breath. They should hold

the air for 2 times and then release it in 6.

C) Visualize a big cone of light above your head. Then imagine this light surrounds you; you are inside this cone of light. Make students breathe slowly and deeply. You are more adventurous, you can even ask students to imagine that they inhaling this colour which fills their bodies. (You may google “chakras” and find the colour connected with each of them so you may energize a different chakra each time)

I'd like to give you something you can read together with your students:

May all beings be peaceful

May all beings be happy

May all beings be safe

May all beings

awaken to the light of their true nature

May all beings be free.

Guest writer

Prof. Alba Pantanali

Some Tips to Improve the Progress of Students with Problems in English Learning

On many occasions we meet worried parents who come to us with the problematic of serious difficulties in the process of language learning of their children. This process sometimes becomes rather stressful for teachers and parents at the time of dealing with their final exams.

Our first step should be inquiring if the students have also any learning problem in their mother tongue. In that case, the process of learning a second language will be longer but not impossible, depending on the seriousness of the case. Besides, maybe they are undergoing a critical temporary period of immaturity or

personal problem, which might be blocking their capacity to study and can be solved.

We have to talk to them in the flesh and try to find out their expectations about the English language. Additionally, we should make sure our students understand the goals and benefits of learning English for their future. We should also check up if there is any kind of social factor such as lack of communication among their mates, teachers or friends which may be also affecting the effectiveness of their language learning. We, as teachers, take on the role of “facilitators”, so we should always observe our students and provide support and opportunities

for them to learn in appropriate conditions.

Another aspect which could restrict our students advance in the acquisition of their second language is shyness. Make the students trust you and help them retrieve their self confidence. They should always feel that we are much concerned about their inner feelings. Our effort to create and keep a friendly atmosphere among teachers and students will always give us good results in our main goal of teaching.

Students must understand that they have to take responsibility for their studies and that it should be their main aim before starting university or getting a job.

Meet their parents and try to get a coordinate task to work together towards the same aim. It is very difficult when parents have economic and other problems to get the ideal environment for students to concentrate on studying.

Some interesting tips to keep in mind:

- a) Explain thoroughly an English subject. Give examples. Lay special emphasis on rules. Compare English structures with their equivalents in Spanish In this way it will be easier for the students to understand them.

Give further practice on grammar points.

- b) Give the students homework to do about the same subject to make them become familiar with the basic structures recently learned.
- c) Next class give the students exercises about the topic, including some with pictures, images, drawings, making the training more pleasant and funnier.
- d) Only if they succeed in the task, go on with another subject.
- e) Another funny way of practising grammar points is the Internet. We can give students different exercises that are presented in an attractive way and they will surely love them.

In conclusion, as English teachers we know when the scholar fulfillment is below the normal average. Although sometimes we cannot change the situation completely, we must get involved with students' education and contribute to their development and knowledge. Only in this way shall we feel the satisfaction of having helped a little to the growth and capacity of that child or adolescent.

Activities on the go!

Prof. Florencia Insua

“Inventing a World”

One of the main issues we need to deal with is students’ attitude to writing. As some students are reluctant to write or they don’t write in their own language we need to spend some time **building the writing habit**.

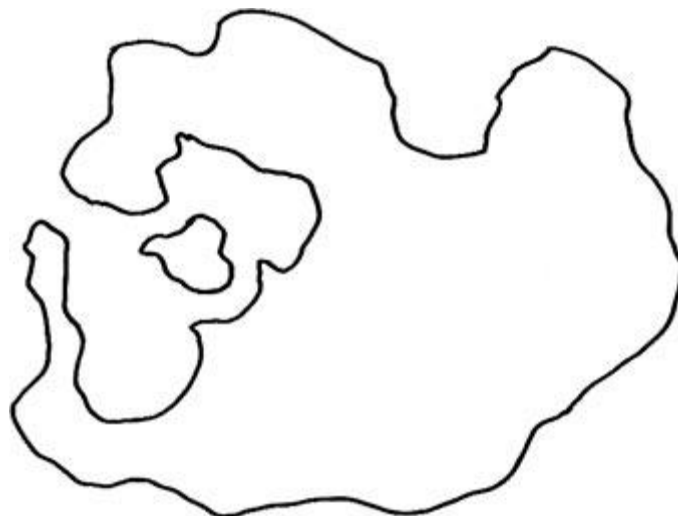
Writing is not an activity we should postpone for later stages in the learning process. We can start developing the habit as well as writing skills during childhood. We need to suggest activities which they find appealing and challenging. Remember that engaging activities involve students **intellectually** and **emotionally**!

This activity is a great choice for motivating children to write their first stories. You’ll find that this lesson provides a space for students to experience writing as an activity which invites them to explore their creativity.

For kids with active imaginations, inventing one’s own world is often a challenge.

Step 1: Make a map.

You can draw an island and make it an odd shape, such as the following one:



Step 2: Add some features.

Give it some mountains or a volcano. Put in rivers, swamps, or lakes. (this is a great way to introduce or revise some vocabulary on geography without them knowing!) It could have forests, beaches, caves, villages. Since this is an imaginary world, any combination of elements is possible. Here's an example:



Step 3: Decide who lives on the island.

Maybe it's a clan or a tribe. It could be talking animals or two groups on each side that don't get along with each other.

Step 4: Give the land a name.

Encourage students to think of a name for their island.

Step 5: Choose a main character or two

Start the story by bringing to the island a main character or two. What would happen when two kids get shipwrecked there? Or a time-traveler shows up?

Or you can ask students to think what their main characters want the most, who may try to stop them, who may help them on their adventure, what obstacles they find on the way.

Step 6: Write your story.

This could be a first attempt. There are many ways to approach this activity. Choose the one that best fits your group. You may not stop with just one story! You can ask kids to keep adding features or visit other children's worlds.

Source: <http://www.brucevanpatter.com/inventaworld.html>

We want to thank all the authorities and the teachers who took part in the workshop “The State of the Art: where we are and where we are going” and the Teachers’ Centre Art Gallery on the day of the celebration of the Teachers’ Centre Anniversary. We also want to thank Pearson for their stand and generosity and to all the people who made it possible to carry out this event at the Asociación.



Prof. Liliana Luna, Head of *Departamento de Alumnos Regulares*, and Prof. Marta Moure, Head of *Departamento de Alumnos Libres*, at the Teachers’ Centre Art Gallery