

ASOCIACION EX ALUMNOS DEL PROFESORADO EN LENGUAS VIVAS "J.R.FERNANDEZ"  
DEPARTAMENTO DE ALUMNOS LIBRES



Teachers' Centre

# AEXALEVI *Forum*

Issue VIII - April 2011

# AEXALEVI *Forum*

Coordinator and editor: Mg. Myrian Casamassima

Issue VIII – April 2011

## C o n t e n t s

### **Renewed Ideas about Yearly Planning: How to Identify and Balance Key Elements in Course Design .....3**

Mg. Myrian Casamassima writes about the principles that were revisited in the Training Session in charge of the Teachers' Centre in the First 2011 Member Teachers' Meeting last April 16.

### **Mario Herrera at *La Asociación* ..... 9**

Mario Herrera, co-author of Backpack Gold published by Pearson Longman, visited *La Asociación* on his 2011 Tour around Argentina. We summarize here the main ideas that he presented in his talk about the series.

### **Interview: Prof. Diana Ogando, Coordinadora del Departamento de Alumnos Libres ..... 12**

Diana talks about her career at *La Asociación* and about her new position as Head of Department.

### **Project: *La Asociación* Embajadora de la Maratón Nacional de Lectura ..... 14**

Welcome to our Project. In this section, you are going to find how we have planned the stages to carry it out.

### **Reading Silently or Reading Aloud? ..... 15**

In our first article related to our Project, we discuss the benefits of reading aloud and reading silently and we suggest ways in which reading can be carried out in our lessons.

### **Teachers talking about Teacher Development ..... 19**

Prof. Paola Fontana shares with us her conclusions about a training session for teachers she has just attended.

# Renewed Ideas about Yearly Planning: How to Identify and Balance Key Elements in Course Design

**Mg. Myrian Casamassima**

**O**n April 16<sup>th</sup>, Mg. Liliana Luna and Prof. Diana Ogando led the First 2011 Member Teachers' Meeting which was held at I.E.S. Lenguas Vivas "J.R. Fernández", where the Annual Plan was presented before over one hundred participants. The Teachers' Centre was in charge of the afternoon training session. We talked about how to identify and balance key elements in the organization of our courses. This article is a summary of the main points discussed in that workshop.

## **Three common situations teachers go through**

At the beginning of the year, we all feel very enthusiastic about new bibliography and about how to renew bibliography that we have been using for some time. It is estimated that very few teachers carry out annual planning before starting their courses and this generally brings about three situations:

- a) Teachers work on the textbook as the main element in their courses and they follow it unit by unit in a linear fashion. When examination time seems to become closer, teachers speed up and focus mainly on grammar. We have called this "The Crunch and Munch Effect", because the students actually have to munch linguistic content that is crunched so that it will fit

before the exam. As you know, this does not result in deep processing.

- b) Teachers follow the textbook unit by unit but they add instances of exam practice on and off by means of mock exams. We have called this “The Mock Effect” as mock exams are final achievement tests, i.e. based on the whole syllabus, and cannot be used for exam practice if the content has not been learnt yet. This results in frustration both for the students and the teachers as students cannot cope with something they are still not ready for.
- c) Teachers follow the textbook unit by unit and they give their students mock exams on and off, but when examination time is closer, they literally dig out of their textbooks whatever requires development over time: projects, links across cultures, links across the curriculum, sections about the real world. We have called this “The Throw-away Effect”.

few principles that may help us organize our work throughout.

## **Principle 1: What we teach is not the textbook.**

Of course we are all too familiar with this. Funnily enough, we follow the book page by page and worry a lot about which units must be included. This year, as it was announced by Prof. Diana Ogando in the Member Teachers’ Meeting last April 16, teachers are going to have access to lists of contents. This list will comprise the contents that will be included in the final exam. Therefore, it is a useful tool to identify in our textbooks what we need to highlight without necessarily leaving aside other contents in the textbook that we consider important for our students. The List of Contents blended with the textbook should be a way of producing more customized courses to cater for our students’ needs. A third element that comes into play is obviously the examination. And last but not least, the reader. These are the four elements we need to blend this year in course design. What we teach will be the result of this blend.

Let us turn this article for a moment into a spot for reflection and let us discuss a

## **Principle 2: Check unit organization in your textbook for more effective selection.**

In communicative textbooks, units are built around themes or topics. One typical arrangement is to have a theme (a macro-theme) for the whole unit and several lessons dealing with subthemes. Towards the end of the unit, there is usually a project that releases the unit into the real world in those cases where the subthemes are more situational and functional than topic-based. If the lessons are built around genuine subthemes, the project integrates the unit or extends one of the subthemes. Themes and subthemes may be tightly or loosely linked to one another. Very loose subthemes can easily be replaced if they do not add much non-linguistic content to the unit. One thing we can try doing is to start by working on the project instead of leaving it towards the end of the unit and running the risk of simply assigning it for homework. Thus, we would be shortening a unit by integrating the linguistic content in a loosely linked lesson with the project. In those cases where there is no project at the end of the unit, we may try including one in order to bring the unit together as one after having dealt with several lessons in a row.

## **Principle 3: Spot density and balance it.**

Density looks at how much content is taught in a single unit and how content is distributed in the textbook. Generally, content is not distributed evenly throughout the textbook. On close examination, you will see that some units are heavier than others and you may even be surprised to find that heavier units tend to cluster towards the end. Principle 3 is closely related to principle 4.

## **Principle 4: Anticipate and spiral as you teach.**

If you have spotted usually hard grammatical content placed in the last units of your textbook, check if the students may need this content before. This might be the case of Reported Speech and Narrative Tenses placed too late in the textbook when students need to narrate stories in writing and orally. Therefore, a possible solution is to anticipate that content by placing it at an earlier point in your course design. This may require that you plan a unit that is not the one in the textbook or that you use materials from other sources such as the reader, for example. Textbooks are still a bit linear and content is revised but not always spiraled. Revision sections in textbooks

tend to include practice exercises, which is good but not enough. Students need chances of putting new and old content together in tasks because that is where they can see how they relate to each other and, thus, they re-signify learning. This is what we mean by spiralling. In short, while revision extends controlled practice of forms, spiralling creates new opportunities for integrating content, both old and new, by engaging in activity. This accounts for our insistence on projects. They are good ways of spiralling.

### **Principle 5: Mock exams are good exam practice if used at the right time.**

We commented on this at the beginning of the article. We can create our own mock exams by producing exam-like exercises with the content we have taught. We can also give priority to exam-like exercises in the textbook so that we can keep exam training going on.

### **Principle 6: Focus on the cognitive skills for exam training.**

One of the points that Prof. Diana Ogando made in her presentation was

the progression in the cognitive as well as on the linguistic demand that exams need to make on students. Certain cognitive abilities have to be developed over time as students progress from course to course. Let us consider the example of recognizing sense groups. Students are expected to identify small chunks in the early courses and move on to the recognition of bigger chunks later on. This cognitive ability is to be applied in exercises in which students have to order the elements provided to make a sentence in the early courses. Later students will need to apply the same ability to fill in a cloze and to provide the missing chunks from a dialogue. As a result, our focus should be on developing this cognitive ability in class by encouraging our students to recognize and produce at least noun phrases instead of isolated words when they read, listen, write and talk. As you can see, exam training goes beyond the instance of practice exercises into overall classwork.

### **Principle 7: Link project with the writing component in the exam.**

Most projects in the textbooks in our bibliography are writing tasks that have a text for reading comprehension as a starting-point. The text models content

and genre. Our suggestion is to develop these projects in class as they are good opportunities for our students to learn how to write mostly although the project may integrate other skills as well.

## **Principle 8: Highlight speaking activities.**

At the Teachers' Centre, in our Face-to-face Forum, we have just started discussing the nature of listening in the real world and listening in the classroom. This is going to become a yearly research project for us. We have a lot to find out about the topic but one conclusion we have drawn is that listening to CD's in the classroom does not seem to be preparing students for listening in the real world. Listening to CD's is actually much more demanding as it is an artificial way of listening to someone. To begin with, in the real world, we can generally see our interlocutor and interact with him or her. The suppression of the visual channel while listening to CD's is an added difficulty as it goes against the very nature of listening. Indeed, listening involves both the auditory and the visual channel. In addition, in real life, we listen with a purpose in mind to an interlocutor that usually shapes his or her speech to us. As we said, we still need to get deeply into the topic but our

first guess is that we may devote less time in class to doing lots of long listening activities and invest more time in doing speaking activities where interactive listening is involved. Students need to develop different skills for oral exams and interactive listening surely has a place among them. In oral exams, students are involved in conversation with examiners and sometimes with peers. This means they need to listen and respond in a social situation, thus resembling real-life interaction. As regards course design, one thing we could do is to do listening activities but to trim them if there are too many in a single unit. The time we do not spend on that can be invested, as we said, in speaking activities that involve interaction. No more listening activities turned into reading comprehension because students could not get it and so we gave them the tapescript. This certainly does not develop listening comprehension.

## **Principle 9: Develop readers over time.**

Readers should be an integral part of the course. They can be linked from without: a topic in the textbook can be related to something in the readers if relevant. If not, readers can be linked from within: readers can become theme generators in that they can trigger

topics which may enable us to connect readers and syllabus to the real world. Thus, readers can generate, for example, whole areas of lexis to be explored.

## **Principle 10: Sketch out your schedule for the year.**

We suggest that you sketch out what you are going to teach and when. This will help you visualize the whole process before you get started and to keep it on track as you go along.

## **Final words**

Our aim in this article has been to reflect on the process of yearly planning as a valuable tool to make the most of our course design. We have discussed some of the principles that may help us design our work for the whole year in the light of the new advances that the Asociación is making towards improvement of quality standards. In our Forum on the Internet, you will find the presentation on this article and a spot to keep reflecting together about renewed ideas. Let us meet there!



Prof. Diana Ogando and Mg. Liliana Luna  
leading the First 2011  
Member Teachers' Meeting.



Over 100 teachers attended the meeting  
last April 16.



# Mario Herrera at *La Asociación*.

**M**ario Herrera, co-author of Backpack Gold published by Pearson Longman, paid us a visit as part of his 2011 Tour around Argentina. Mario has just celebrated his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Pearson Longman: he is gifted writer and a welcoming human being. But perhaps the best description of Mario is that of a constructivist teacher and he has certainly made Backpack Gold stand out as a constructivist series.



Mario Herrera with Prof. Diana Ogando, *Coordinadora del Departamento de Alumnos Libres*, and Paola Ulloa, Sales and Marketing Manager with Pearson Longman.

Mario Herrera centred his talk on the methodology underlying Backpack Gold rather than on his components. He defined himself as a constructivist teacher and writer, and he showed us how constructivist principles operate in the series. Mario said he felt he was giving time back to teachers by providing them with tools that save

time. Perhaps the most explicit example of a time-saving tool is the way in which Backpack Gold goes around assessment. There is a variety of assessment tools at several points in the unit plus an assessment package with a test generator. The reason for this is that we need to keep assessment as an ongoing process and

in order to achieve this goal, we need to have suitable tools within reach.

In Backpack Gold, topics build towards the child's security and emotions. Three constructivist principles are at work here:

- 1) The brain: fostering the development of cognition.
- 2) The body: encouraging physical involvement.
- 3) Emotions: making room for feelings and for the awareness of emotions.

Mario called these three elements "the Trinity".

## **How presentation is organized within the unit**

Units start with opportunities for the students to get engaged into the topic through songs in what Mario calls the warm-up, which we will find on the first page of the unit. There may be a little bit of presentation at this point. But this is not presentation in the traditional way. In Backpack Gold, grammar is modeled first and there is lots of exposure to it before the students focus on how it works. Engagement is sought by means of appealing and high-quality pictures. In the lower levels, Backpack

Gold also includes stickers to encourage kinesthetic involvement.

As we move ahead in the unit, we will see language in the real world. This is actually a second presentation of the language in the unit. The good thing about this is that the students are exposed to the target vocabulary and grammar now for the second time and in a real-world context. Although this is a second presentation, there is no grammar description yet as concepts must first build up for rules to be derived at a later stage. This is a genuine constructivist principle.

## **Constructivist grammar**

Mario Herrera and his co-author, Diane Pinkley, are credited for having developed a constructivist way of teaching grammar. Mario described several stages in which grammar is developed in Backpack Gold. In the first stage, the students work with a grammar chart but no grammar rules yet. In this chart, grammar is modeled and it is expected that this together with all the work the students have done so far in the unit will help the students begin to notice certain things about grammar. Awareness comes before systematization. In the next stages, the students ask and answer questions, read a text, interact with one another, i.e. they continue exploring grammar as it is modeled and used in real-world

contexts. The systematization of grammar comes at the end of the book. The higher the level, the thicker the grammar section. The idea behind this organization is that very young learners do not actually need to learn labels for grammar. They need to learn to use grammar.

## Stories, projects and values

After grammar, there is listening comprehension, there are chants. What is more, there are stories, projects and values.

Mario said that projects reinforce the unit content and allow students to apply and personalize their learning. In Backpack Gold, projects are presented through pictures. The first two pictures show children doing the project. Mario made a point of not assigning the project for homework and highlighted the richness that is implied in doing the project in class while children interact with their peers. The third picture on the project page shows the children presenting their project. This is how Backpack Gold helps children see what they are expected to do as part of their projects.

The same idea applied to projects is applied to values in Backpack Gold. Values are first shown by means of situations in pictures. Then the children

talk about the value itself and reflect about it.

Stories are developed in content readers. This is where Backpack Gold includes the CLIL component. CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning and it is becoming the in-thing in English Language Teaching these days. Backpack Gold has room for it in the stories and in the texts that deal with real-world issues.

And as this is a constructivist series, there is an appeal to learner autonomy with activities in which students learn how to learn.

## Beyond Constructivism

Even beyond Constructivism, Backpack Gold incorporates multimedia into learning and teaching thus developing a truly multidimensional methodology. We would like to thank Mario Herrera and Pearson Longman for creating this unique opportunity of meeting the author and learning about the methodology on which this series is built.



Mario Herrera chatting with the teachers in the coffee break

## Interview

# Prof. Diana Ogando

## Coordinadora del Departamento de Alumnos Libres



**A**s from February 2011, *La Asociación* has a new coordinator in *Departamento de Alumnos Libres*. We have asked Diana about her career at this prestigious institution and about her projects as a coordinator. This is what she told us.

### **How long have you been working at *La Asociación*?**

I started working at *La Asociación* in 1993, a very special year for our beloved institution. A bright new era was about to start back then as the new premises at *Paraguay 1935* were opened to offer the community more and much more varied opportunities for quality learning.

I was very young at the time, still a student at college, and fascinated by the idea of working at such a prestigious institution. I could hardly believe it when, after my interview, Liliana Luna popped the question, ‘*At the moment we have an opening in 2<sup>nd</sup> Children. Would you like to take the course?*’ I had never been happier. I was now, officially, a teacher at *La Asociación*.

### **What do you treasure the most after all these years in this institution?**

Working for long periods of time at one place requires adaptability, flexibility, and commitment. I believe all teachers working at *La Asociación* share this view, a unifying view, which has undoubtedly contributed, over the years, to build a strong sense of belonging.

In educational institutions teachers are the driving force; unity among them is vital: with the proper support system, individuals can reach their goals and thrive in a nurturing work environment. This is probably what I treasure the most, the professionals I have met, the friends I have made, the many truly memorable moments I have shared with my

students, all of these I cherish in my memory and heart.

**How would you describe yourself as a Coordinator?**

As a coordinator I have always been eager to inspire passion for our work and the desire to become better professionals day by day. Motivation is a crucial factor in any learning process and teachers, as lifelong learners, need to experience it in any number of ways. Sharing information and knowledge in a caring environment is a challenge most coordinators should definitely be willing to pursue.

**Could you express your mission now in a few words?**

My mission as a Coordinator is, primarily, to create a bond based on trust among all people involved - member institutions, teachers and *La Asociación* - through a *togetherness approach*, which will include us all and help us build a community of learning.

**How does your experience as a teacher at *La Asociación* contribute to your new position?**

Having worked as a teacher here has proven most valuable in my career so far and will contribute to this

new endeavour without a shadow of a doubt. It has given me the opportunity to work in different courses and levels, with all kinds of age groups and allowed me to build a wide range of valuable teaching experiences. I have also been involved in a few small scale innovation projects regarding assessment and evaluation issues.

Working as an examiner for *La Asociación* has also given me the chance to experience the whole testing process over the years and to be in touch with many of the member teachers in our network, an invaluable experience which has inspired most of the ideas developed in my innovation project.

**What is the core of your Project as a Coordinator?**

*La Asociación* has been a leading institution in the fields of teaching, assessing and accrediting students' knowledge of foreign languages for over eighty years.

It is our challenge now to sustain those standards which have placed our institution at such high levels of excellence and work towards a gradual innovation process which will encompass three basic principles:

- Promote regular and constant communication opportunities among members and the institution.

- Offer quality and up-to-date exams to cater for diverse contexts within the Argentine territory.
- Provide professional support for member teachers.

**What does your new position mean to you, both on a professional and on a personal level?**

This new position means a lot to me on both levels, professional and personal. First and foremost, this place is very dear to me - we could say I became a professional teacher here- and I feel the time is right to make a

meaningful contribution to the institution which welcomed me in the early stages of my teaching career and has provided me with plentiful opportunities for professional growth.

I am looking forward to leading a supportive team of colleagues towards new goals in our search for academic excellence. It is a real honour for me to be able to share this task with such a warm and committed group of professionals.

***Thank you, Diana!***

---

---

**Joins us in our Forum on the Internet!**

Log in now at [www.aexalevi.org.ar](http://www.aexalevi.org.ar)

Or

Send us an email to [teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar](mailto:teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar)  
and we will gladly do it for you

You will find lots of ideas, resources and activities for your students. Do not miss it!

# Project

## La Asociación Embajadora de la Maratón Nacional de Lectura

Join us in the encouragement and enjoyment of reading

Welcome to our Project. This is what we are planning to do.  
We are looking forward to your participation!

### STAGE 1: Paving the way for the “Maratón”.

#### May – August

- Reading Tasks and Suggestions for Reading will be available in our **Forum** on the Internet. You can make your own suggestions and share your experience here.
- In each issue of **AEXALEVI Forum**, our publication on the Internet, you will find articles relevant to the “Maratón”. You can download each issue from our website.

Please send us photos and videos of your students doing the activities in this first stage. We are going to organize an exhibition of the Paving-the-way stage for **Teachers´ Day**. We would like you and your institution to be part of it.

Send your photos to [alumnoslibres@aexalevi.org.ar](mailto:alumnoslibres@aexalevi.org.ar)

Send your videos in a DVD by post

If you upload the video in Youtube, send us the link.

### STAGE 2: Running the “Maratón”.

#### From September 26<sup>th</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> .

- Plan a special reading week for all your students as this is the time to carry out the “Maratón” proper.
- Keep a record of the activities that you carry out during that week. You can exhibit this material at your own place.
- Share your experience in our Forum.

Please send us photos and videos of your students doing the activities during the “Maratón”. We are going to organize an exhibition for our convention. We would like you and your institution to be part of it.

### STAGE 3: Asociación First Convention 2011

#### Beyond Literature into the Media, Culture and Art.

October 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> , 2011

This two-day Teacher-development convention will explore how the roads that emerge from Literature expand into the media and into the world of culture and art. This convention will extend the work that we have carried out for the “Maratón Nacional de Lectura”.

# La Asociación Embajadora de la Maratón Nacional de Lectura

## Silent Reading or Reading Aloud?

**W**e have all asked ourselves which of the two benefits our students the most, either silent reading or reading aloud, and it is often hard to come to a definite conclusion as the practice of reading aloud has been quite dominant over the last few decades with an emphasis from the Communicative Approach on oral communication. This article takes up this issue with the aim to foster reading habits among our students.

### Which question first?

The first question that we need to ask ourselves is not whether our students should read silently or aloud. Instead, we will ask ourselves what processes take place in our students' minds as they read a story. It seems that the human brain thinks better when it thinks in stories as narrative thought is natural to human beings. This means that as we read a story, we spot characters with permanent features and temporary traits, setting in time and place, cause-effect relationships among the actions that these characters engage in. All these are actually elements that make up a story. As we said, human thought is predominantly narrative. When we read a story, we begin to process these elements on-line, as it were, and we create our own story. Different readers

create different stories out of the same text, as reading comprehension is built on individual cognitive mapping, i.e. on how each one of us has constructed knowledge inside the mind.

Let us imagine for a minute what it means to undergo the process that we have just described while we are asked to read aloud. We teachers are certainly an exception to the rule as we have been trained to read aloud and to do first-sight reading. However, the picture is quite different for our students. They are learning a foreign language, developing the skills and gaining self-confidence, just to mention a few of the things that may be concurrent to the process of reading aloud. We have all witnessed students struggling over words while the rest of the class goes off task. We all agree



that this is certainly not our idea of enjoyment and success.

The assumption that because the students are reading aloud, they understand the text at one go could not be farther from the truth. Actually, reading aloud adds difficulties and hampers the process of comprehension, which is both complex and gradual. We need chances to build up our understanding of the story by reading it and by intervening in the text through activities that facilitate the whole process. In other words, reading is not a linear thing. It is not that we read and we understand.

Does this mean that I should never ask my students to read aloud? Certainly not. But we must make sure that the text to be read aloud should be a text meant for reading aloud such a dialogue, or that the story is familiar to the students because they have worked thoroughly on it, or that the story has been written by the students and, as a result, they know it very well.

## **Can I play the story on the CD to my students?**

The question is when. One of the biggest problems is to make students keep on reading a text. We sometimes read it aloud to the students and some other times we play the CD to them. Both practices pose the question of

what to do as regards pace. When students read a story, they follow a certain inner pace: they may read bits, they may skip words or lines, they may go back to something they read before and so on. What is really happening inside the students' minds, we do not know. But something is certain: pace imposed from the outside by the teacher or the recording on the CD may not help. Does this mean that I should never use a CD or read aloud to my students? Certainly not. The recording on the CD may be useful to set the scene of the story if we just play it for a few seconds. This may even motivate the students to read on and it may prepare their frames of mind for what is coming. The recording or selections of it can be played later on as we move ahead with the reading process. Our reading aloud to the students may be turned into storytelling: reading aloud; pausing; interacting with them; showing them pictures; using voice, eye-contact, gestures and actions to convey meaning.

We tend to associate lack of understanding with vocabulary. Although it is true that we need to know the words to understand a text, the problem goes beyond the vocabulary issue. Reading comprehension calls for correct chunking. Reading aloud to students, especially in the shape of storytelling, helps them to develop the skill of chunking as they read on. It may

be the case that students know the vocabulary, but cannot group the words in meaningful units. After all, language does not work on the basis of words in isolation, but in chunks: words that stick together to make sense.

## Silent Reading

If you have ever heard about the Whole Language Approach, you have heard about Unstructured Sustained Silent Reading – USSR for short. This is the time in class devoted to silent reading. It is carried out on a regular basis: this is why it is called “sustained”. It is unstructured: each student is free to choose a story to read. For practical

purposes, we can shape USSR into simply SSR in our classes. We need to acknowledge that time and bibliography often impose restrictions on what we can do with our students. At least, we can try sustaining silent reading with the readers in our bibliography to begin with. Then, we can take SSR back to USSR for our students to bring books to the class, to exchange them, and to choose what they would like to read. We may even try free e-books on the Internet. Our students may not read the whole book, but that is not what matters. We are mainly interested in bridging the gap between them and the world of reading.

### Would you like to continue your Teacher Development?

We surely have something to suit your needs.

#### Online Courses

Learn from home and at your own pace.

#### Face-to-face Forum

We meet at *La Asociación* every other Friday from 3 to 5 p.m.  
Our next meeting will be held on May 6.

#### New Course: Language and Teaching

Come to *La Asociación* twice a month to brush up your knowledge of Language, Phonology, Literature and Technology.

Contact us at  
[teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar](mailto:teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar)

# Teachers Talking about Teacher Development

**Prof. Paola Fontana talks about her experience in the training sessions “Teaching Young Learners” organized by Oxford University Press.**

**A**ttending the training sessions on “Teaching Young Learners” by Silvia Retaroli was an enriching, motivating and fun experience. Not only did I learn lots of new things and had fruitful interactions with other colleagues but also enjoyed the fact that sessions were hands on all along, which made the experience definitely memorable. Needless to say, once more I confirmed what all teachers know at heart: it is easier to transmit what we ourselves have experienced and enjoyed beforehand.

I was asked to write about what I found most interesting of all in the training sessions, so that it could be printed in this issue and read by all of you, my dear fellow teachers. The request set me thinking about each one of the issues tackled. How to make the right choice turned out to be a problem since I came to the conclusion that everything was extremely useful, interesting and motivating. Moreover, the feeling I had at the end of each session was like wanting to run into the classroom to try out everything I had experienced.

I finally made up my mind and I chose to discuss the issue of Speaking activities, which is always a great challenge for every teacher. Besides, in

the case of young learners, speaking as a skill is sometimes overlooked.

We, teachers, need to consider the role of speaking activities for young learners and think carefully about the importance of fluency vs. accuracy together with meaning and form. To plan a good speaking lesson we should incorporate all these through different games and activities.

## **Crucial points to make the most of speaking activities**

1. Make it authentic: the speaking segment has to be as real as possible so that the learners

see the reason for doing the task.

2. Make it meaningful: children always focus on meaning not just on speaking for the sake of it.
3. Create an Information Gap: ask learners to complete a task in English.
- 4 Balance fluency and accuracy: this is a difficult issue, an ongoing battle. The age of your students should be used as a parameter to put the emphasis on accuracy. As they get older we can include more accuracy activities. Make sure not to overcorrect or students will `shut-down` and lose confidence.
- 5 Make activities fun!!!: it is our role to engage the students in learning and fun is always a winning choice .

Here are some examples of the activities which I was engaged in the sessions. I honestly had a lot of fun and I am trying them out in class these days.

**Tasks** (useful for focusing young learners on meaningful activities which often require integrated skills and team work):

Running Dictation: Put sentences or texts up around the room or outside the room. Students work in pairs. One is the runner (cannot write), the other one is the writer. The writer remains seated at the desk while the runner runs to the text, reads it and tries to commit it to memory as much as possible before going back to their partner and dictating it. They will have to make many trips to try and remember everything and the writers will have to focus on accuracy as much they can.

Shadow dictation: students are put into pairs and the teacher reads a short paragraph at normal speed. One child writes as much as he can while the other only listens. Afterwards they work together trying to reconstruct the text perfectly.

## Games

They are a great way of encouraging speaking in the classroom in a fun atmosphere.

### Board games

Guessing games: 20 questions

I spy

Back to the board: three students sit with their backs to the board, the teacher writes a different country/

fruit/ famous person behind each of them and they take turns to ask the class yes/no questions to find out the answer. If the answer to the student's question is YES, he/ she can go on asking if it is NO, it is the next student's turn.

- How do they think the movie/story should end?
- Could they write any more verses to the chant/song?

## Response and Personalization

Responding and personalizing encourages learners to fully appreciate meaning, and interact with the task or text. When teachers use the responding and personalizing technique, students internalize grammatical structures and important vocabulary more readily and are more likely to remember them. They will try to be innovative with language in order to express their feelings. Mistakes will be made but also huge jumps!

Whenever learners read, watch a movie, listen to a song ... we should exploit the language by asking them what they think about it.

Do they like it? Why? Why not?

### Personalization

To make it more real for the learners, you can get them to consider the following:

- Has anything similar ever happened to them?

## Final Comments

I hope you find some of these ideas useful for your lessons. I would really like to share with you the feeling of satisfaction after attending this seminar. I, as a working mother, have hardly any time to do anything else other than work, but I strongly believe we have to try and find the time to attend seminars on Teacher development or at least do anything that will keep ourselves interested in learning about teaching. I guess this is vital not only for the students' sake but for our own. We should take an interest in self development and these sessions I was lucky enough to attend have helped me feel more motivated to go on learning.

I would like to thank *La Asociación* for this opportunity. I assure you it has been a fruitful seminar and the activities are paying off in class. Why don't we all give them a try!!!!

***Thank you, Paola!***